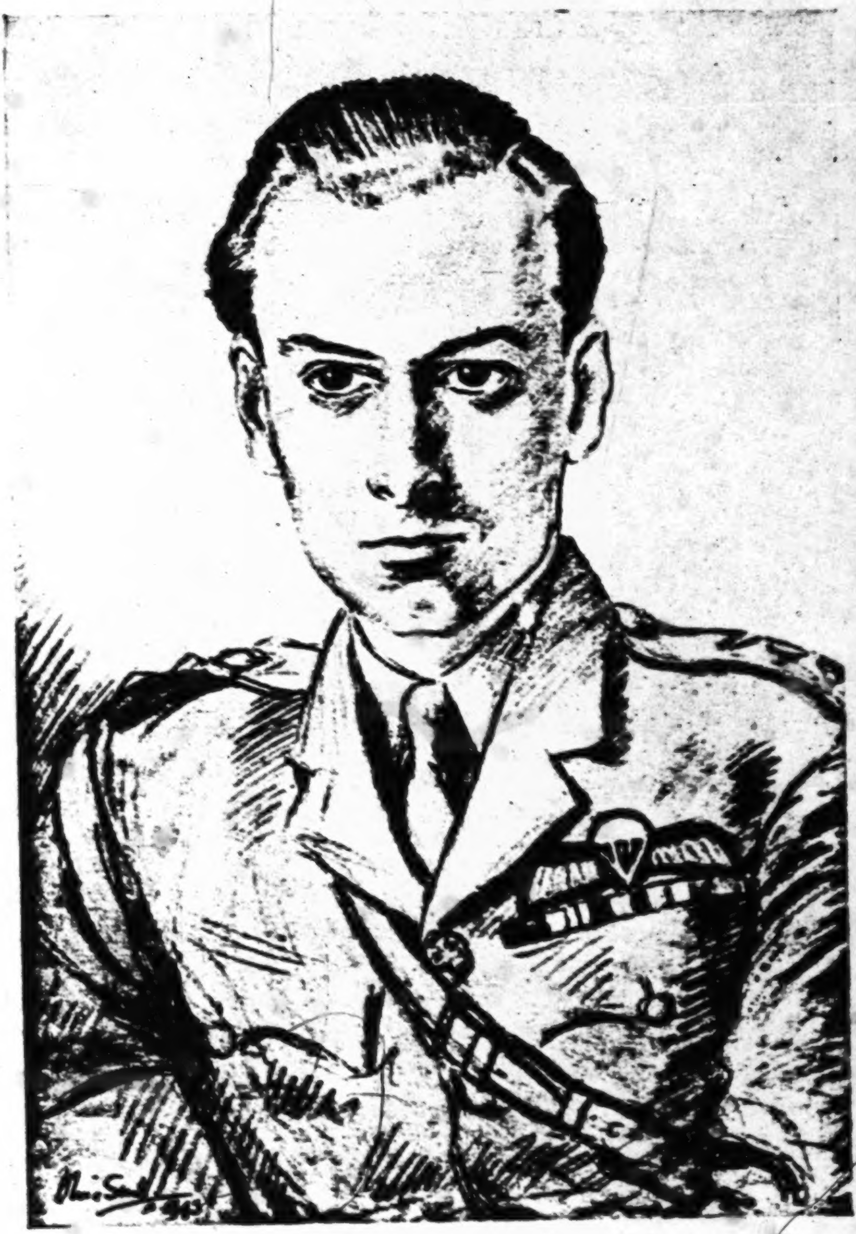

THE AUTHOR

(From a drawing by Olive Snell)

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SONS OF THE EAGLE

A Study in Guerilla War

BY

JULIAN AMERY

For Death or Liberty

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oooSONS OF THE EAGLE

101 The Albanians, who claim descent from the ancient Illyrians and Epirots, call themselves "Shkipetare", which, being interpreted, means "Sons of the Eagle". According to their folk-lore, they derive this name from a remark attributed to Pyrrhus, the King of Epirus. Returning from his victories in Macedonia, Pyrrhus was hailed by his troops as "Eagle", because of the swiftness of his movements in war. "You call me Eagle", he is said to have answered ,"and it is true; for you, my soldiers, are 'Sons of the Eagle', and your lances are the pinions on which I soar."—J. A.

"Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together."—St. Matthew xxiv. 28.

NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF ALBANIAN NAMES

194 In the spelling of names and place-names, I have sought to render the original Albanian as nearly as possible as it is pronounced. To this end I have employed a system of English consonants and Italian vowels. I have thus eschewed the conventions of modern Albanian spelling which, however logical in themselves, give to an Englishman an entirely false impression of the sounds which they are intended to transcribe.[1] Likewise, in the rendering of South Slav names, I have preferred what seems to me the more natural and phonetic spelling to the conventions of the official " Latinitza ". I have followed the same course in the rendering of the many Albanian names which are derived from Turkish or Arabic.

My sole object has been to convey to the reader the strange sounds of a strange land, in the hope that they may evoke for him — for such is the magic of sounds — something of the atmosphere in which we lived.

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[1] Thus, in modern Albanian, the name of the present Albanian Prime Minister is written *Hoxha*, though pronounced *Hoja*.

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PREFACE

The Resistance Movements of the second World War will 000 not lack their memorials. The passions which they aroused, the causes which they served, and the deeds which they inspired assure them a lasting place in the annals of history. Their military worth has been acknowledged alike by victors and by vanquished; and their influence will long be felt in the affairs of the nations.

From 1940 to 1945 I was variously associated with the [114] Resistance Movements of the Balkans, and more especially with those of the South Slavs and the Albanians. I have written here of the Albanian Revolt, but the implications of my theme inevitably transcend the narrow limits of Albania. The story of Abas Kupi and Enver Hoja is, in its essentials, the story of Mihailovitch and Tito, of Zervas and E.A.M. In a wider sense, indeed, it is also the story of de Gaulle and Thorez, of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung. The forms may change but the content is the same; for Resistance is a universal phenomenon—a compound of war and revolution.

To stir up strife behind an enemy's lines is a stratagem as old as war itself; but in this last war new techniques of wireless-transmission and airborne-supply made possible the long-range preparation and support of revolts in occupied territories on a scale unexampled in history. The organisation of Resistance has thus become a distinct branch of the art of war, of comparable importance as an instrument of national policy to the traditional arms and the new weapons of the atomic age.

The chronicle of events recorded in these pages has been [117] composed with the help of contemporary diaries and reports. The mind, however, tends irresistibly to impose a pattern on its memories, and it has not always been easy to recapture the mental and moral climate of our experiences. Yet therein lay much of their personal significance.

In the seven months that our mission lasted we lived 000 always at extremes: of frost-bite or of sunstroke; forced marches or cramped hide-outs; ravenous hunger or gluttonous feasting; the peace of nature or the toil of war. Yet in these violent circumstances, where only the normal seemed strange, we found freedom; for though our tasks were hard we were our own taskmasters, answerable only to ourselves: outlaws in the land where we worked, strangers among the guerillas, and cut off from our own kind by the mountains, the sea, and the ranks of the enemy.

Above all, we found a strange serenity, induced perhaps by our surroundings. In the man-made world of cities, men dominate the stage on which they strut: with us their sound and fury were dwarfed by the petrified violence of the mountains and awed by the silent witness of the stars. The danger of our work might lead us at times to exaggerate its importance, but we were ever reminded by the world about us of the insignificance of all human endeavour. Our thoughts and actions were thus continually refreshed by a sense of proportion born of the contemplation of a struggle of transitory mortals against the background of the " timeless hills "; an experience not far removed from worship.

We failed; and not the least of the causes of our failure was our seeming impotence as a nation to proclaim a new faith to which the stricken peoples of Europe might have turned. In the dark days when we had stood alone, England had fired the world by her example, and men had believed that we might fashion a new order out of the furnace of war. As victory drew on, their hopes receded, and others stepped in to claim the prize for which we had toiled. Much of our work, above all in the Balkans, was swept away in " the gale of the world ". Yet I do not believe that we worked in vain. The weakness or the error of our policies will be forgotten or forgiven with the lapse of time, but the peoples will long remember the British officers and men who came to them out of the sea and down from the sky, to share their hardships in the hour of need. These only did their duty, but in so doing they sowed a seed; and one day there will be a harvest.

J. A.

112 Eaton Square, London,
November 4, 1947

CONTENTS

PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION 1
II. PROLOGUE 23
III. RECONNAISSANCE 72
IV. CROSS-ROADS 160
V. CIVIL WAR 206
VI. WAR ON TWO FRONTS 256
VII. DEFEAT IN VICTORY 302
EPILOGUE 339
INDEX 341

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MOST of the photographs with which this book is illustrated were taken by my colleagues, Maclean, Smiley, Kemp, and Hibberdine. To them, to Hare and Simcox, and to certain of my Albanian friends I am also indebted for much valuable information concerning those events in my story in which I did not myself take part.

Contemporary diaries and reports have been my chief sources of reference. I should also like to pay a tribute to Mr. J. C. Swire's *Albania: the Rise of a Kingdom*, which was of the greatest help, not merely in the writing of this book, but also in the practical preparation of my mission to Albania.

In accordance with the provisions of the Official Secrets Act, my manuscript was submitted to the competent authorities before publication. I am alone responsible, however, for the opinions which I have expressed, and for the accuracy of the statements which I have made.

J. A.

LIST OF MAPS

The Storm Centres of the Eastern Question *End papers*

FACING PAGE

Albania 14

Map to illustrate the situation in Northern Albania, and the activities of the Maclean Mission, April–November 1944 162

Sketch Map showing Operations during First Partisan Campaign against Abas Kupi, 29th June to 27th July 1944 210

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE AUTHOR *Frontispiece*
FACING PAGE
ABAS KUPI 52
GANI BEY KRYEZIU AS AN OFFICER IN THE ALBANIAN ARMY 52
BRITISH MISSION AND PARTISAN LEADERS, SUMMER 1943 53
PARTISANS OF THE FIRST BRIGADE ON THE MARCH, SUMMER 1943 53
BRIGADIER DAVIES AND HIS STAFF, AUTUMN 1943 68
PARTISANS IN LIBERATED POGRADETZ, OCTOBER 1943 68
THE PLATEAU AT BIZA, WHERE WE LANDED 69
ON THE WAY TO SHENGYERG 69
ZOGIST GUERILLAS AT ZIBER 84
REPRISALS 84
A MATI BEY 85
DULE BEY ALLEMANI 85
KAPLAN BEY CHELAI 116
"WE" — SMILEY, THE AUTHOR, MACLEAN 116
ABAS KUPI WITH TWO CHIEFS FROM THE TIRANA MOUNTAINS 117
THE ZOGIST HEADQUARTERS AT SHUPAL 117
MORTAR TRAINING AT ZOGIST HEADQUARTERS 132
ABAS KUPI DICTATING TO A SECRETARY 132
SAID BEY KRYEZIU 133
MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR 133
MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR WITH HIS BODYGUARD 148
LIUMAN CHIEFTAINS 149
MAIN GATEWAY OF MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR'S CASTLE 149
ON THE TRAIL BETWEEN LIUMA AND JAKOVA 164
ANOTHER VIEW BETWEEN LIUMA AND JAKOVA 164

FACING PAGE
Gani Kryeziu and his Staff 165
The City of Jakova 180
Beyond the Drin 180
Smiley and his Cheta 181
George Seymour and Pater Lek Luli 181
Maclean and Abas Kupi in Conference 196
Glade of Zogolli 196
On the Way back from Lura 197
Houses burning during the Civil War 197
Corporal Davis (Chuni) sending a Signal by Wireless 228
Deciphering a Signal 228
Skinning a Sheep 229
Supper 229
Ihsan Bey Toptani 244
General Prenk Previsi 244
A Mirdite Clansman 245
Our Hostess at Skurrai 245
Smiley, the Author, and Turkoman Deserters 276
A Kazak Patrol 276
Achmet 277
Our Tajik Cook 277
Turkomans baking Bread 292
A Turkoman Machine-gun Post 292
Leaders of the Balli Kombetar 293
Smiley, beside the Mati in Flood 293
The Church at Velyes 308
Abas Kupi taking leave of the Priest of Velyes, before the final Retreat to the Sea 308
Our last Headquarters (a prosperous House) 309
The Beach where we Embarked 309
The Author, during the Retreat to Mirdita 324
"Sons of the Eagle" 324
Abas Kupi 325

I

INTRODUCTION

Land of Albania! where Iskander rose,
Theme of the young, and beacon of the wise,
And he his namesake, whose oft-baffled foes
Shrunk from his deeds of chivalrous emprize:
Land of Albania! let me bend mine eyes
On thee, thou rugged Nurse of savage men!

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (Canto II, verse 38)

1

THE lands of the Levant have ever been the most glittering of the prizes for which the nations have contended; for they are the cross-roads of the world; the ground where Europe, Asia, and Africa come together. In the many revolutions of human affairs the region has been threatened and attacked and overrun from every point of the compass; but, with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the Eastern Question has become the special concern of the Great Powers of Europe. The hope of Eastern dominion has aroused their ambitions and inflamed their jealousies; and they have striven for its conquest in trade, diplomacy, and war.

The Balkan Peninsula has been the natural arena of their struggle, for it is in the Balkans that their paths to the East converge. The high-road to the East is the Mediterranean; but those who would reach it from Eastern or Central Europe must first travel one of three ways: the Black Sea; the Danube, Morava and Vardar valleys; or the Adriatic sea. These ways are joined to the Mediterranean high-road at the Dardanelles, the port of Salonika, and the Straits of Otranto; and the strategic importance of these three positions has made them the storm centres of the Eastern Question.

The Straits of Otranto, where the waters of the Adriatic

The Straits of Otranto, where the waters of the Adriatic
131 merge into the main basin of the Mediterranean, divide the
133 Apulian heel of Italy from the land of Albania — the setting of my tale. The Italian shore is flat, featureless, and without a considerable harbour; but on the Albanian side the coastal range of the Dinaric Alps curves back from the sea, as if to protect the mainland approaches to the port of Valona, which lies where the straits are narrowest. Albania is thus a fortified enclave on the west coast of the Balkan Peninsula, and the Power that controls it commands the entrance to the Adriatic Sea. This enclave, moreover, forms a natural bridgehead for Italy in the Balkans: from Valona to Salonika is but two hundred miles; and, though the mountains of the interior present notable obstacles to communications, a Power established across this neck of the peninsula would command two of the three key positions on the roads that lead from Europe to the East.

175 The fate of a territory of such strategic importance could scarcely be a matter of indifference to the Powers; and the briefest review of Albania's past suggests that it has been an enduring cause of contention between them in their efforts to acquire or to preserve a dominant position in the Adriatic or the Eastern Mediterranean. The rising sea power of Rome clashed with the navies of Illyria and Epirus, and subjected those kingdoms to her rule, in order to confirm her supremacy in the Adriatic. Once the control of the straits was assured, the new provinces were converted into a base for imperial expansion; and Dyrrachium, the modern Durazzo, became the head of the Via Egnatia, the great artery of empire which ran through Thessalonika (Salonika) to the East. Rome's Byzantine successor held fast to the Albanian coasts to preserve the Eastern Mediterranean from Adriatic enemies, until Norman sea power supplanted her there, and gave the land its present name. In the wake of the Normans came armies of Crusaders, who crossed from Italy into Albania to follow the ancient Roman road to the East. The ephemeral empires of Bulgaria and Serbia spread, in their turn, to control the entrance to the Adriatic, while the more enduring mercantile power of Venice long strove, and with varying success, to establish itself on the

175 Albanian coast. The freedom of the Straits of Otranto was, indeed, the vital interest of the republic; and it was Venice which, in part, supplied the sinews of war and the liaison officers with which Skanderbeg defied the armies of the Sultan.

[177] The Turkish occupation of Albania provided the Ottoman Empire with a useful shield against attacks out of the Adriatic; and for close on five centuries the country was preserved from other foreign influences. In the Napoleonic wars, however, while Britain and France wrestled for supremacy in the Mediterranean, their agents began to intrigue with Ali the Lion, Pasha of Yannina, to secure control of the Straits of Otranto. Thereafter the slow dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire gave rise to an Albanian Question; and, as the nineteenth century advanced, the nations of Europe addressed themselves with growing interest to the problem of the country's future. Great Britain, the dominant sea power in the Eastern Mediterranean, strove to exclude her potential rivals from this strategic area, and for long buttressed the crumbling authority of the Turk. Russia encouraged the designs of her Serbian and Montenegrin satellites on Albanian territory, to extend her influence to the warm waters and deny their access to the Dual Monarchy. Austria-Hungary and Italy, as rival Adriatic powers, each sought to establish its predominance in Albania, " the possession of which ", as Count Tittoni observed, " would mean for either Italy or Austria-Hungary the incontestable supremacy of the Adriatic Sea ".

The balance of contending forces long sustained the rule of the Turk in Albania and served the aims of British policy in the Eastern Mediterranean. The victory, however, of the Balkan Allies in the war of 1912 brought the Ottoman Empire in Europe to an end. A partition of Albania was threatened; but the jealousies of the Powers led, in the following year, to the creation, for the first time in centuries, of an independent Albanian state. At the time the new principality was characterised as " an illegitimate child of Austrian diplomacy with Italy figuring as the midwife "; but its emergence, none the less, conformed with alternative policies long advocated in the Foreign Office.

175 The outbreak of the first World War shattered the precarious equilibrium on which the infant state of Albania had reposed. The armies of Serbia, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and France occupied parts of the country, sometimes in accordance with the dictates of military necessity, but not least with a view to staking out their claims against the day of settlement. The victory left Great Britain and France supreme in the Levant and in the Balkans, and Albania was accordingly restored to her independence within the frontiers of 1913.

648 The Empires of Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey lay prostrate or dismembered, and Albania now became the object of fierce rivalry between Italy and the new Adriatic power of Yugoslavia. Both states naturally strove to control the Straits of Otranto; Italy prevailed, and, in 1926, by the Pact of Tirana, acquired a virtual protectorate over Albania. The Duce might for a time rest content with Italian supremacy in the Adriatic; but, as one step leads to another, so the mastery of this route to the Levant led him to turn his eyes to the Levant itself. He revolved ambitious plans for its conquest by sea and land, and designed that Albania should serve him, not only as the key to the Adriatic, but also as the bridgehead of a new Roman Empire in the Balkans. Accordingly, in April 1939, when diplomacy had failed to compel Albania's subservience, he occupied the country and began to build a network of roads along which Italian armies might march to the East in the footsteps of the Legions.

000 Each of these episodes from Albania's past is but a variation on the underlying theme of the struggle of the Powers to control, or at least deny to their rivals, the key to the Adriatic road to the East. The recent war, accompanied by the return of Germany and Russia to the ranks of the rivals for the dominion of the Levant, gave a new impetus to this struggle. At times it was submerged in the broader conflict which engulfed the world; yet ever and again it reasserted itself, developing a momentum of its own, regardless of alliances or enmities: for if war is an extension of politics, both are projections of geography.

In this struggle for the control of Albania the Albanian people, too, had their part, for they formed the permanent 000 garrison of the key to the Adriatic. Once again, as so often in the past, the rival nations vied with one another to secure the friendship or compel the obedience of the Albanians; and they, owning no common allegiance, took sides and changed them in accordance with the dictates of interest and the counsels of opportunity. Thus the situation in Albania came to reflect, as in a mirror, the true relations between the Powers, obscured to the general view by the smoke of battle blown before the wind of words.

The policies of nations devolve in the last instance upon individuals; and in this, as in past struggles, lone men went out among the Albanian mountaineers to make their local feuds subserve the divergent and often inconsistent purposes of the strategists and statesmen who had sent them forth. Of these men I was one; and of a part of what I saw this is the tale.

2

The Albanians are a distinct people, not perhaps a nation, [181] but remarkable by the strength of their sense of nationality. Archaeologists believe the two main branches of their race — 101 the Ghegs and Tosks, whom the river Shkumbi divides — to be descended from the ancient Illyrians and Pelasgians. These peoples, perhaps the earliest Aryan invaders of the Balkans, may once have inhabited the whole region between the Danube and the Aegean and Adriatic seas; but successive waves of invasion have worn them down by assimilation or massacre, and only a remnant survive in the land known as Albania.

This land, the exact boundaries of which have fluctuated 133 with the fortunes of the Albanians and their conquerors, forms a wedge between the massif of Montenegro and the Pindus range. It consists of a rich but malarial coastal plain, in which lie the two harbours of Durazzo and Valona, and a mountainous interior; an extension of the Dinaric Alps. In contrast, however, to the bare and arid Karst of Dalmatia, the Albanian mountains are thickly wooded and convulsed out of their former

7: Amery 6-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

133 symmetry into a tangle of high and broken ranges. The valleys they enclose are narrow but fertile, and from them powerful streams pursue their twisted courses down to the Adriatic.

361 Albania has many times been overrun in the strife of empires for the control of the Straits of Otranto; and it is in the almost inaccessible fastnesses of the interior rather than in the rich coastal plain that the remnant of the Illyrians have made their homes. There they have found freedom; for, so wild and rugged are the mountains, and so poor the prospect of wealth which they offer, that none of Albania's conquerors have attempted to rule them except in name.

To this day the majority of the Albanians live in the
mountains; but at different times — when the growth of popu-
lation in the highlands has pressed too hard upon the means of
subsistence, or when political conditions have been favourable
— families have moved down to the plains or to the towns.
Thus, in the seventeenth century, under the protection of Islam,
the tribesmen of the North flowed back into the Kossovo. But
[181] the trend has been a slow one; for the Albanians prize freedom
above all else, and many that have descended to the plains have
returned again to the mountains. The plains are rich, but, as
the malaria saps a man's strength, so work on the big estates
destroys his independence, and submission to the laws of the
conqueror corrupts his soul. Thus the lowlands have ever been
the province of the foreign overlord, and it is in the mountains,
beyond the reach of invaders and guarded by the armed might
of the clans, that the moral and material strength of Albania
resides.

642 The steep and rugged mountains, the deep and pathless forests, the drifts of snow in winter, and the spate of the rivers in spring and autumn have preserved the Albanians from foreign conquerors. But these obstacles to communications, which have so often turned back hostile armies, have operated powerfully against the growth of a centralised Albanian state. Geography has thus combined with contending foreign Powers to promote disunity among the Albanians. The ancient Illyrian and Pelasgian kingdoms were seldom even allied, and, under the Turkish Empire, the country was divided for political and

administrative ends. Indeed, save for the short-lived rule of 642 Skanderbeg, there had never been an independent Albania until modern times. It is therefore small matter for surprise that the Albanians have hardly acquired a national or state consciousness; nor indeed, outside of the towns and the coastal plain, has nature encouraged, or their way of life given rise to, social organisation in any form.

At the time of which I write, the family, or clan, was the 621 basic, indeed the only unit of society among the Gheg mountaineers; and was held together by common ownership of the means of production and common interest in their defence. The head, or chief, of the clan still preserved patriarchal powers, sometimes even of life and death over its members. He arranged their marriages, allotted them their tasks, settled their disputes, and decided what courses they should follow in the burning issues of blood feuds and politics. In recent years, however, the [619] spread of Western ideas had weakened the traditional respect for the patriarchal authority; nor was there any sufficient intermediate patriotism of the province or the village to take its place. Indeed, the village community as we know it did not exist, for the village of the Gheg highlands was but a group of houses, each often as much as a mile from its neighbour. There were no village councils or other corporate institutions, and the feuds between the inhabitants prevailed over their common interests. The ancient tribal system was thus dissolving into anarchy, for where there is no community there can be no law. Indeed, the cry of "stop thief!" would have 000 been almost inconceivable among the Albanians, "Because", as Wordsworth wrote of other highlanders:

> the good old rule
> Sufficeth them, the simple plan,
> That they should take, who have the power,
> And they should keep who can.

In such circumstances, each man had to be his own law-giver, and alone, or at best with the help of his family, defended his rights or punished those that trespassed against him.

Anarchy knows no prisons — the most fundamental of social

628 Anarchy knows no prisons—the most fundamental of social institutions — so that the only punishment inflicted among the tribesmen was death. Here lay the origin of the blood feud; the scourge of life in the mountains and a practice of the deepest social significance. In a community, any crime is an offence against society as a whole, and the appropriate penalties are prescribed in accordance with the law. Under anarchy, however, as in international relations, the importance of a crime lies less in its intrinsic character than in the challenge which it represents to the victim's prestige. All crimes, therefore, be they murder, rape, theft, or merely insult, are of equal weight; and the consideration which a man will receive from his fellows depends upon the speed and violence with which he avenges a wrong. Prestige, however, can only suffer from a public slight; and it was said among the Albanians that though a rough word in company would often lead to a feud of years, a blow unseen by third parties might well be forgotten.

The same considerations of prestige which lay at the root of the blood feuds were the cause of their persistence. The rights and wrongs of a particular vendetta might arouse little interest, but the manner of its prosecution was the public test of the power of the clans concerned. On rare occasions the aggressors might confess their guilt and the aggrieved forgo their pound of flesh for an indemnity in cash or kind. Otherwise the blood feud would be waged, perhaps without passion and with many truces, but relentlessly, sometimes even for generations, until both sides to the dispute were agreed that enough blood had flowed for the account to be closed with honour. The blood feuds were thus both an effect of anarchy, and, by the divisions which they multiplied among the mountaineers, a cause of its perpetuation. To such an extent, indeed, did they dominate the daily life of the Albanians — and naturally, for few things occupy a man's mind so effectively as the fear of sudden death — that, in most issues which arose among them, they took sides according to their feuds rather than their opinions.

183 Travellers returning from Albania have been wont to dwell on the famous code of honour, the Law of Lek, which is said to prescribe the rules of the blood feud and the general manners

of the mountaineers. This ancient code of conduct has un- 183
doubtedly exercised a restraining influence on the clansmen and helped to soften the grim realities of anarchy. None the less it was our experience that, like other codes of chivalry and laws of war, it was honoured as much in the breach as in the observance. This was perhaps a recent development, born of the crisis of the times or of the influence of Western ideas unaccompanied by Western conditions. Be this as it may, what most [671]
impressed us in the way of life of the Albanians was not the stray survivals of their ancient customs but the extent to which they lived without a law at all.

If anarchy was the way, poverty was the standard of their 511
lives. They subsisted mainly from their flocks and upon maize, grown wherever the valleys offered soil for their wooden ploughs to scratch, or traded in the towns against hides and dairy produce. Their fare was simple; their clothing homespun; the forests gave them fuel, and, with the rocks of the mountain, their building materials. They lived, Turkish fashion, on the ground, and, beyond a few rugs, mattresses, and cooking utensils, required no other furniture or amenities. Tobacco, salt, sugar, and coffee, were their luxuries; weapons their chief expenditure and pride.

But besides this pastoral economy there was another source 662
of wealth from which the mountaineers, and especially the chief men among them, drew their strength. Bad communications made coercion difficult, but the poverty of the clans made the power of money great. Elsewhere this might have been of no great moment, but in the Balkans the clashing interests of the Powers afforded frequent opportunities for holding the Central Government to ransom, or indulging in mercenary enterprise on behalf of the foreigner. Such enterprise had ever been a time-honoured means of livelihood among the Albanians; and, if the Eastern Question had caused the ruin of their merchants, it had also created boom conditions for their mercenaries. Such indeed had been the influx of gold and arms into the mountains in the past hundred years that it was perhaps not too much to say that the whole economy and strength of many of the clans had become dependent on subsidies received for "political

662 services" from the Central Government or from foreign Powers. Nor were the chiefs the only ones to gain, for the profits of a mercenary leader depend on the strength of his following. The rival chieftains competed for the support of the smaller fry; and these passed in and out of the orbits of their betters according to their hopes of wealth or fears of defeat. Thus in time the foreign gold circulated down to the poorest shepherd.

Such practices were lucrative and naturally congenial to the Albanians; for they despised manual labour as a task for women, regarding only fighting and its preparations as man's work. Mercenary enterprise, moreover, was conducive to social stability, for the chief derived his wealth not from the exploitation of his clansmen but from the subsidies of the foreigner or the spoils of war. A common interest in his success induced a spirit of partnership among his followers, while the fierce competition of rivals encouraged his liberality or corrected his avarice. At the same time each accession of strength which he derived from his foreign paymasters was almost automatically balanced by the complementary reinforcement of his rivals by other foreign Powers. Mercenary enterprise thus proved to be an expanding economy; and, to guard against the dangers of a slump, the rival chiefs were not above stimulating the flow of subsidies by timely collusion.

The Albanians were of the Balkans; and so the natural insecurity of their lives, inherent in the anarchy and poverty of their circumstances, was aggravated, if at times enriched, by the struggle of the Powers to spread their influence along the road to the East. Life under such conditions could not but be "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"; yet from its very
181 grimness the Albanians drew their strength. Anarchy developed their independence, not only in their relations to other men, but in their thoughts; for they were free from all those prejudices, taboos, and inhibitions which limit the outlook of those who belong to an organised community. Poverty lent a severe pragmatism to their thought, so that they judged only by results, knowing that, if man cannot live by bread alone, he cannot even subsist without it. Insecurity sharpened their awareness and deepened their understanding of human nature, trying their values by the acid test of survival.

7: Amery G-6 (1943-44) 1948 EGI Albania EGI

trying their values by the acid test of survival. Nor were they[1] 177 isolated from the world around them; for the tides of invasion that swept through their valleys, and the cross-currents of foreign intrigue which penetrated into their mountains continually refreshed them with new ideas. Some of them, moreover, travelled to the ends of the earth in the service of their conquerors, to act, on their return, as a ferment among their fellow countrymen. Likewise the three religions which they 795 honoured — the Roman Catholic, the Orthodox, and the Moslem — were powerful vehicles for the spread of foreign influences, whether from Pope or Patriarch or Sheikh-Ul-Islam.

These religions represented traditional loyalties rather than 771 living creeds to the Albanians. Indeed religious devotion and ideological fervour were alike alien to them, being based on social concepts inapplicable to the anarchy in which they lived. In the past, when politics had been conducted under the sign of religion, they had freely apostatised to secure material advantage. Likewise, in our time, they variously proclaimed themselves Fascists, Communists, or Democrats, in obedience to the calculations of interest rather than to the dictates of conviction. The growth among them of the Bektashi sect suggested that, left to themselves, their religious instinct might have developed towards some form of Pantheism, perhaps in the tradition of the Oracle of Dodona and the hierarchy of gods which Hellas inherited from the ancient Illyrians. Instead, the 181 contemplation of the endless struggle for survival and power which characterised every phase of their daily life induced in them an all-pervading materialism. In ideas they discerned but the banners under which forces are gathered; and they mistrusted words as a cloak for intentions rather than as a means for their expression.

Politics they understood instinctively, for the relations between the Great Powers were daily made manifest to them in terms of golden coin and leaden shot. Besides, where there is no law, all human relationships are understood in terms of the struggle for power which underlies them and which is the very stuff of politics. The life of the clans was indeed a great school of *realpolitik*; and though the Albanians are few the fertility

[1] [the Albanians -- Analyst]

181 of their political genius is attested by the number of remarkable men of action which their race has given to the world. Alexander the Great, Pyrrhus of Epirus, the Köprülüs, Mehmet Ali of Egypt, Ali of Yannina, Condouriotis, Crispi, and Kemal Ataturk may justly be reckoned among them; not to speak of more than twenty Grand Viziers, and a host of Generals and politicians who served the empires of Macedon, Rome, and Turkey. Yet it is significant of the disunity and intractability of their nation that, although Albanians have often risen to rule empires, only twice in a thousand years — under Skanderbeg and under Zog; and then only with foreign support — has an Albanian ruled Albania.

The Albanians were thus remarkable as individuals rather than as a people, representative perhaps of the highest levels to which man can attain without submitting to the yoke and goad of a community. Their life was too harsh and their amenities too few to permit of any flowering of culture, but, though their circumstances were primitive beyond measure, yet they were [142] never barbarous. Their aquiline features and delicate hands were matched by a dignity of bearing and tolerance of outlook eloquent of the natural distinction of their race. Pyrrhus had called them *shkipetare*, or Sons of the Eagle, and their fierce and predatory natures well deserved the name. Keen of eye and cold of heart, they were bold in decision, but, like all mercenaries, unpredictable in battle. Freedom and vengeance were their ruling passions; and they lived without joy and died with reluctance rather than regret. Ungovernably proud, they were impatient of all restraint, utterly unteachable, deaf to appeals, suspicious of intentions, hard to lead, and impossible to drive; great gentlemen and great robbers, prizing honour above honesty, gold more than both and power beyond them all.

3

642 THE independence of Albania was not achieved by the exertions of the Albanians: the mountaineers among them had never been other than independent, while the townsmen had wel-

comed Turkish protection against the Slavs and Greeks who 642
threatened them on every side. It resulted rather from the jealousies of the Powers; and it was their representatives who determined the territories of the new state with such singular disregard for economic and ethnological considerations that they left as many Albanians outside the boundaries of Albania as within them.

The total number of Albanians has been generally computed [162]
at some two millions. Of these, upwards of one million lived within the frontiers which were proposed by the Ambassadors' Conference in 1913, ratified in 1926, and once more restored in 1945. Of the remainder, more than six hundred thousand inhabited the Kossovo, while the others were scattered in Montenegro, Macedonia, and Epirus. The amputation [243]
of the Kossovo was a heavy loss to the new state; for the region was the natural granary of the northern provinces, and the standard of living of the Ghegs rose or fell according as they were allowed or denied free access to it.

The economic and social structure of the Ghegs, or Northern 184
Albanians, was one of tribal anarchy, save in the coastal plain 621
and the Kossovo, where there were feudal estates. Islam and [162]
Roman Catholicism were the accepted religions: the Moslems inhabiting Central and North-eastern Albania with the Kossovo, the Catholics Mirdita and the inaccessible ranges of the north-west. A way of life near to the tribal system of the Ghegs still survived in the mountains of Southern Albania, but the Tosk tribes had never wholly recovered from the repressions of Ali the Lion and had increasingly disintegrated into communities of landowning peasants. The broad plains of the South, however, remained divided into feudal estates, owned by an Ottomanised ruling class and worked in part by an Orthodox Christian peasantry. Thus, while the distinction between Moslems and Catholics was one of geography and history, the Catholics being those Albanians whom the Turks had never subdued, that between Moslems and Orthodox was one rather of class and of cash.

It was scarcely to be expected that a conference of ambassa- 578
dors would quickly set up a strong state among a people divided 642

578 6/2 by geography, dialect, religion, and tradition, as well as by the new frontiers assigned to them. Nor indeed were the Powers conspicuous by their efforts to achieve Albanian unity. The German Prince of Wied, whom they chose as head of the new state, arrived in Durazzo in March 1914, with no previous experience of the Balkans and little enough of fallen human nature. He found his principality torn between three armed factions, each supported by foreign gold and inspired by the personal ambition of their leaders. These were Prenk Bib Doda Pasha, hereditary Captain of the Catholic Mirdita; Essad Pasha Toptani, a former general of the Turkish army and the most powerful chief in Central Albania; and Ismail Kemal Vlora, a cousin of the Grand Vizier Ferid Pasha and the chief man among the Tosks. On his arrival the Prince invited these warlike men to dinner, and, in the course of conversation, Prenk Bib Doda turned to him and remarked:

"If Albania is to be ruled peacefully, three persons ought to be hanged: Ismail Kemal, Essad Pasha, and myself! If all three of us were dead Albania would fare much better!"

Seldom in history has such disinterested advice been tendered by a subject to his sovereign. Prince William, however, failed to act upon it and within six months he was driven from his throne, never to return, by the bashi-bazouks of Essad Pasha and Ismail Kemal.

In the years of the first World War and of its aftermath, Prenk and Ismail Kemal intrigued and counter-intrigued with the agents of the Powers whose armies marched and counter-marched across Albania. But they were not destined to see the final settlement: Ismail Kemal died in Italy in 1918, apparently of natural causes, while Prenk and Essad were both murdered in 1920 at the instigation of the Italian Government; the latter while attending the Peace Conference in Paris. In Albania strife and confusion persisted for a time; but, with the passing of the old leaders and in face of the determination of Italy, Yugoslavia, and Greece to deny to each other the control of the Straits of Otranto, the internal political situation slowly crystallised into a recognisable form.

000 A new generation of political leaders now came forward,

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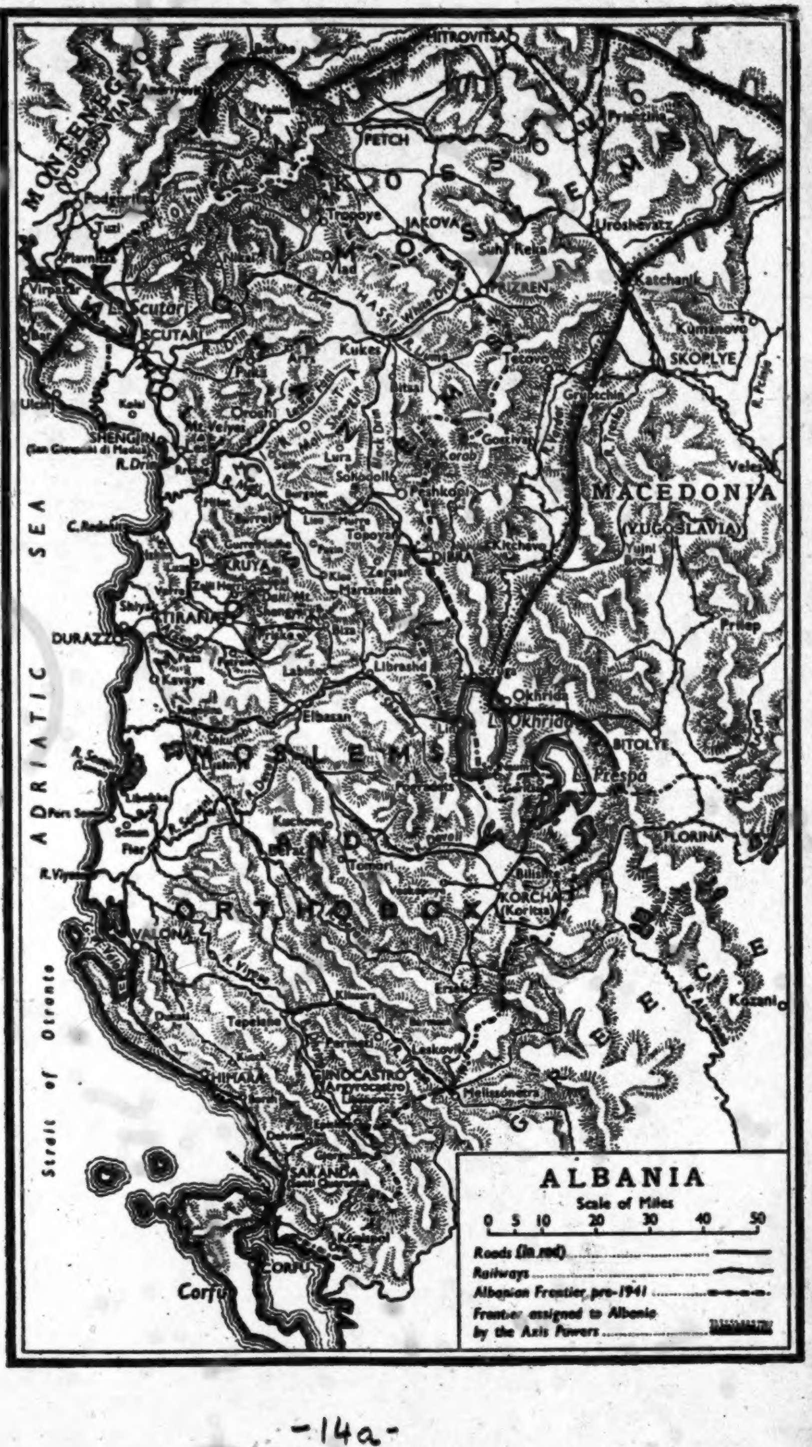
ALBANIA
Scale of Miles
0 5 10 20 30 40 50
Roads (in red)
Railways
Albanian Frontier pre-1941
Frontier assigned to Albania by the Axis Powers
MONTENEGRO (YUGOSLAVIA)
KOSSOVO
MACEDONIA (YUGOSLAVIA)
GREECE
ADRIATIC SEA
Strait of Otranto
MOSLEMS AND ORTHODOX
MITROVITSA
PETCH
Priështina
Podgoritsa
Tuzi
Plavnitsa
Virpazar
Bar
L. Scutari
SCUTARI
Ulcini
SHENGJIN
(San Giovanni di Medua)
R. Drin
C. Rodoni
Tropoye
JAKOVA
Suhi Reka
Uroshevatz
Katchanik
PRIZREN
Kukes
Tetovo
Kumanovo
SKOPLYE
Gostivar
Peshkopi
DIBRA
Kitchevo
Veles
KRUYA
TIRANA
DURAZZO
Shiyak
Kavaye
Elbasan
Librazhd
Struga
Okhrida
L. Okhrida
BITOLYE
Prespa
Prilep
FLORINA
KORCHA (Koritsa)
Bilishte
Berat
Tomori
Fier
R. Vyosa
VALONA
Tepelene
Premeti
Leskovik
Erseke
ARGIROCASTRO (Argyrocastro)
HIMARA
SARANDA
Konispol
CORFU
Corfu
Kozani

665 A new generation of political leaders now came forward,[1] many of whom were to play an important part in this story. In the South, the Orthodox Bishop Fan Noli, with a group of returned emigrants from the United States, formed a party professing Radical principles. He met with some support, especially among the landless Orthodox peasantry, but his movement suffered from the difficulties of applying advanced Western political theories to tribal or feudal communities where the Ottoman tradition of government still prevailed. The Moslems of the South also formed a party, to which most of the Tosk beys adhered. Prominent among its leaders were Ali Klissura, Midhat Frasheri, and Mehdi Frasheri, who represented perhaps the most enlightened element among the Albanians, combining a Western education with practical experience of administration in the Ottoman civil service. Mehdi Frasheri indeed had been Governor of Jerusalem under the Turks, and was later to surprise his colleagues in the League of Nations Assembly by a speech on the Palestine Mandate such as they had scarcely expected from the Albanian delegate. In the North there were tribal factions rather than political parties. The leader of the Catholics was Jon Marko Joni, who had become Captain of the Mirdita in succession to Prenk Bib Doda and was for a time the protagonist of a Serbian inspired plan for the creation of an autonomous Mirdite Republic. Bairam Bey Tsuri and Tsena Bey Kryeziu, two hot-tempered guerilla leaders, contended for supremacy among the Moslem clans of the north-east, while Mustafa Kruya and Sufi Elezi 643 were paramount in Kruya and in Dibra. But the strongest man in the country, drawing his power, like Essad Pasha before him, from the fighting men of Mati and the rich landowners of Central Albania, was Ahmet Bey Zog.

643 159 Ahmet Zog was born in 1895 of a family of Mati Beys with a long tradition of distinguished service to the Ottoman Empire. When he was but a boy his grandfather, Jemal Pasha, conspired with Marshal Rejeb Pasha to carve out an independent Albanian kingdom from the ruin of Turkish power in Europe. The Marshal was at the time in command of the Turkish armies in Tripoli and planned to sail to Albania with his best troops as soon as Jemal Pasha should raise the standard of revolt. But

[1] [After Paris Peace Conference, 1920 -- Analyst]

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Sultan Abdul Hamid, sitting in the Yildiz at the centre of his web of spies, got wind of the conspiracy. He dared not recall Rejeb Pasha or order his arrest; for he knew that the African army was loyal to the Marshal, and feared that such a move might provoke the very revolt which he wished to prevent. Instead he simulated a political crisis, and, dismissing his Divan, offered the Ministry of War to Rejeb. The Marshal accepted, confident that the secret of his conspiracy was well kept, and thinking perhaps that he could carry out his plans the more easily, once in control of the whole military machine of the Empire. He accordingly repaired to Stamboul, and, on his arrival, was summoned to an audience at the Yildiz. The Imperial Guard, an Albanian unit, was drawn up in his honour; and if he came with misgivings they must have been dispelled by the marks of confidence and affection with which the Sultan received him. From the Imperial presence Rejeb Pasha drove back to the capital and proceeded to the Ministry of War to take up his new functions. He was shown into his office, where obsequious secretaries lit his cigarette and brought him a cup of coffee. Of it he drank and died: the Sultan's agents had poisoned it.

The conspiracy was scotched, but it would have been no easy task for the Turkish authorities to have arrested Jemal Pasha Zog among the mountaineers of Mati. The Sultan, however, judged it politic to forget, and was content to have young Ahmed Zog brought to Stamboul as a hostage for his grandfather's loyalty. The old ruler took a liking to the boy and had him brought up in the palace and educated at the officers' school in the Galata Saray. He sent him for his holidays to Macedonia, the Crimea, the Caucasus, and Egypt — but never to his home — and even made him for a time one of his A.D.C.s. Thus at an early age Zog absorbed the principles of Oriental government, and learned from its greatest living exponent the art of playing off his enemies one against another.

When the Young Turks deposed the Sultan, Zog escaped through Macedonia to his home in Mati. He was still a mere boy, but he led his clansmen against the Serbs during the Balkan Wars, and on one occasion raided as far as the suburbs

of Skoplje. In the first World War he made common cause with 643
the Austrians, and, thanks to his influence in Mati, was made a 159
colonel in the Albanian forces formed under their aegis. It was not long, however, before an incident, illustrative of the man's character, brought him into conflict with his allies. It had originally been agreed that the Albanian forces should march under their own national flag, but the Austrian authorities presently issued an order that they should fly instead the colours of the Dual Monarchy. Three Albanian officers resisted the change and were shot on the order of an over-zealous Austrian colonel. When Zog heard of their deaths, he arrested the first three Austrian officers he could lay hands on, and had them executed in reprisal. This action confronted the Austrian general commanding in Albania with a delicate problem: he could hardly overlook such a gesture of defiance, yet he feared to proceed against Zog lest by so doing he should alienate the men of Mati and other Albanians friendly to Austria. In the end the order concerning the colours was rescinded, and Zog was posted to the Imperial Headquarters: an appointment which amounted in practice to honourable confinement in Vienna. There he was kindly received by the old Emperor, and once again internment gave him the chance to learn something of the ways of another great Empire which had long played a leading part in the Balkans. Constantinople and Vienna were not, perhaps, bad schools for a future ruler of Albania.

As soon as the war was over, Zog returned to Albania and 643
set about reorganising his faction. Despite his youth — he was 669
only twenty-five in 1920 — he soon became the strongest single 159
influence in the land and was the real power either in, or behind, the many governments that followed one another up to 1924. His authority derived from the rifles of the Gheg tribesmen and the money-bags of the Gheg *beys*; and it would seem that, in return for their support, he assigned to them a lavish share in the fruits of power. The preference thus shown to the Ghegs was a natural cause of discontent among the Tosks and combined with personal jealousies to create a revolutionary situation. Bishop Fan Noli joined forces with Ali Klissura and the

Tosk *beys*, and won the support of Mustafa Kruya, the cunning Gheg chieftain who swayed Kruya province. With considerable skill they isolated Zog from his supporters, and in 1924 seized power by insurrection and drove him across the border into Yugoslavia.

The conflict between Zog and Fan Noli has sometimes been characterised as a struggle for power between " conservatives " and " progressives "; but in this, as in almost all Albanian revolts, the division between the contending parties was one of geography and faction rather than of opinion or class. Much was offered to the masses in the programmes of both sides, but the practice in either case redounded chiefly to the advantage of the men in power. It will perhaps be sufficient comment on the policies of the Fan Noli regime to record the Bishop's own verdict on the causes of his failure: " By insisting on the agrarian reforms ", he afterwards wrote, " I aroused the wrath of the landed aristocracy: by failing to carry them out I lost the support of the peasant masses ".[1]

Zog meanwhile had been joined in Belgrade by Tsena Bey Kryeziu, the head of a powerful Jakova clan which could boast of having given fourteen Pashas to the Ottoman Empire. Tsena had a numerous following among the Albanians on both sides of the Yugoslav-Albanian border, as well as friends in high places in Belgrade. He now made common cause with Zog, and together they plotted a counter-revolution. Zog rallied round him a group of Albanian *émigrés*, and with their help prepared the tribes inside Albania for a rising. Tsena meanwhile, with the approval of the Yugoslav authorities, raised and trained an army of Kossovars, who were to form the spearhead of the revolt. The Yugoslav Government abetted the conspiracy as a means of increasing their influence in Albania: they supplied Zog and Tsena with money and with arms, and stiffened their tribal levies with veterans from General Wrangel's White Russian army, which was then concentrated in Yugoslavia. The Powers closed their eyes to these unneighbourly proceedings, and, in December of 1924, Zog and Tsena marched into Albania at the head of their Kossovar and Russian troops.

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[1] Quoted by J. Swire in *Albania: the Rise of a Kingdom*, p. 444.

Their supporters rose in revolt; the government forces were 643
defeated; and a fortnight later Zog occupied Tirana. Fan 669
Noli escaped to Italy and later emigrated to the United States; Ali Klissura settled in Paris; and Mustafa Kruya went to Italy, where he became the goad with which in later years the Italians threatened Zog. These three were condemned to death *in contumaciam*; but most of the Tosk leaders were seemingly reconciled to the new regime.

It was widely expected that Zog would rule as the instru- 643
ment of the Yugoslavs to whom he owed the success of his 648
revolution;[1] and indeed the powerful influence of Tsena, who was his brother-in-law as well as his Minister of Interior, was exercised in favour of friendship with Belgrade. The policy of a country, however, is more often the effect of its circumstances than their cause. The Yugoslavs had brought the new regime to power, but they were in no position to supply it with the financial and technical assistance without which it could scarcely be maintained. Of necessity, therefore, Zog inclined increasingly towards the Italians, who were quick to seize any opportunity of re-establishing their influence in Albania. Tsena Kryeziu, however, resolutely opposed a pro-Italian policy. He was first and foremost a Kossovar; and his whole purpose in supporting the revolt had been to restore good relations with Belgrade and so reduce the effects of the frontier barrier which separated his people from their fellow Albanians. His efforts, however, were doomed to failure by the inability of the Yugoslavs to compete against the financial support which the Italians offered to Zog. His influence swiftly declined; and, after the signing of the Pact of Tirana, Zog appointed him Albanian Minister in Belgrade, to remove him from the centre of affairs. It is possible that Tsena there conspired with the Yugoslavs to repeat against Zog the same revolutionary tactics as he had carried out with him against Fan Noli. Be this as it may, in October 1927 he was shot dead in a café in Prague by an Albanian student. The responsibility for the crime was commonly ascribed to Zog; and, though his complicity was never established, Tsena's brothers, Gani, Hassan, and Said, judged it prudent to emigrate to Yugoslavia.

[1] [Cf. category 669, pp. 17-19 for data on 1924 revolution—Analyst]

643 Within a year of Tsena's murder Zog cemented his personal position by the assumption of the crown and style of King of the Albanians. The republican sympathies of the Tosk *beys* were disarmed by their mutual jealousies; and the new regime was established among the Ghegs by the efforts of a quadrumvirate of chiefs. These were Muharrem Bairaktar, Fikri Dine, Jemal Herri, and Prenk Previsi, who had all followed Zog into exile in Yugoslavia and had played an important part in the subsequent revolution. In the discharge of their duties they acquired considerable influence, but when they had served the royal purpose Zog broke their power, which might one day have challenged his own. In their place he installed new men, who proved more obedient to his wishes as they were more dependent upon his favour. Thus, in a period of five years, the royal dictatorship was made absolute.

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315 Meanwhile Italian influence grew in Albania until the country's foreign relations and economic development came to be largely under Italian direction. Such a trend was indeed almost as inevitable in the economic as in the diplomatic sphere, for Albania possesses few natural resources which might have attracted the attention of other Powers. At one time, however, it appeared that the Albanian oil deposits might become of international interest; and an instructive tale is told of their emergence on the diplomatic scene. At one of the many international conferences which followed the last war, Albania was represented by Faik Bey Konitza, a man of considerable wit and distinction. Faik Bey was anxious to secure British support for his country's claims, and, after several unsuccessful applications, was reluctantly granted an interview by Lord Curzon. Curzon received Faik standing, and coldly invited him to be brief. The Albanian delegate bowed and replied:

"Your Excellency, in Albania there is oil."

Curzon's eyes lit up: "Sit down, my dear fellow," he said, suddenly unbending; and to the astonishment of the impatient secretaries their discussion was prolonged beyond the hour. Nor will the reader be surprised to learn that at the plenary session, next morning, the rights of a small nation were generously vindicated by the majestic eloquence of the British Foreign

Secretary. *Si non è vero è ben trovato,* for a concession was 648
in fact granted to the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. For a 315
variety of reasons, however, by no means exclusively commercial, the development of the oil-field was left to the Italians.

Italian influence in Albania was strong, but the King brooked 643
little interference in the internal administration of the country. 648
He drove hard bargains for every concession, insisted on retaining a British mission to train the gendarmerie, and gained from the Italians far more than he ever gave them. So long as Italy's ambitions were limited to assuring her predominance in the Adriatic such a situation was not unsatisfactory, for then her chief concern was to prevent other Powers extending their influence to Albania rather than to control the country herself. But when Mussolini decided that Albania should become the bridgehead from which his forces would march to the East, he was forced to recognise that Zog was of too independent a temper to serve this grand design. In April 1939, therefore, he decreed the invasion and annexation of Albania. The Italian landing at Durazzo was gallantly contested by the commandant of Kruya, a certain Abas Kupi. Otherwise there was no resistance. The King declined the unequal encounter and crossed into Greece with Queen Geraldine and their new-born son. From Greece he came by devious routes to Paris, and, after the fall of France, settled in London. The most loyal, or anti-Italian, of his subjects followed him into exile, and, for the most part, found hospitality in Yugoslavia or Turkey. Meanwhile, under the general amnesty proclaimed by the Italians, his chief opponents, including Ali Klissura and Mustafa Kruya, returned to Albania. An Italian Viceroy was installed in Tirana, the friends of Italy were rewarded, and a puppet government was set up on the bayonets of the invaders.

Zog had found Albania in chaos; he left her with at least 643
the rudiments of a modern state. Roads had been built; the framework of an administration created; and order, if not law, enforced. The King governed, indeed, in the oriental tradition, but it was also the tradition of his people. He corrupted his enemies, or played them off one against the other, and adminis-

643 tered justice less with regard for the law than with an understanding of when harshness or mercy would most impress the public mind. No doubt he favoured the Ghegs at the expense of the Tosks, and left unredeemed his repeated promises of agrarian reform. No ruler, however, can escape his special obligations to his supporters; and what is possible, rather than what is desirable, must always be the test by which a statesman is judged. It is no mean political achievement to have kept Albania united for fifteen years above the cross-currents of foreign intrigue and the shifting sands of her own domestic feuds. That is the real measure of Zog's capacity to rule; and the universal respect of his enemies is perhaps the surest title of his fame.

II

PROLOGUE

> **Leninism recognises the latent revolutionary capacities of the national liberation movement and the possibility of utilising these capacities for the purpose of overthrowing the common enemy, for the purpose of overthrowing imperialism.**
>
> **JOSEPH STALIN : *The Foundations of Leninism***

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1

I SPENT the summer of 1939 on the Dalmatian coast, striving to complete in time for "schools" the work that I had left undone in my first two years at Oxford. I buried myself in the study of the causes of the first World War, and, oblivious of the greater catastrophe that was already impending, sought to unravel the tangled skein of the intrigues of Triple Alliance and Triple Entente. Suddenly, at the end of August, a telegram from the Air Ministry summoned me to report for duty; war seemed certain; and, as a member of the University Air Squadron, I was on the reserve of the R.A.F. I therefore laid aside Grant Robertson, Gooch, and Pribram — war would at least provide a dispensation from examinations — and, dismissing from my mind the machinations of Iswolski and the manœuvres of Berchtold, hurried off to Belgrade to report to the Air Attaché.

I had hoped at first to join our Military Mission in Poland, but this plan was frustrated by the delays of official correspondence and the early collapse of the Polish armies. Instead I accepted an invitation from Sir Ronald Campbell to join his staff, and was duly seconded as an attaché to our Legation in Belgrade, where my work was mainly concerned with matters of press and propaganda.

At the beginning of 1940 the staff of the Legation was

000 strengthened by the arrival of an Assistant Naval Attaché, Lieut.-Commander Sandy Glen. We became friends at once and presently took a spacious flat together with a view to enlarging our circle of Yugoslav acquaintances by means of judicious entertaining. Sandy Glen was short, prematurely bald, with small eyes glinting behind powerful spectacles. Before the war he had been in turn a banker and an arctic explorer, and beneath a seeming omniscience was possessed of a considerable fund of varied knowledge. He spoke little of his professional activities, but it was soon clear to me that they were by no means as blamelessly " diplomatic " as my own. I was therefore not altogether surprised when one evening in March he told me that " the Chief " of his " show " was on his way to Belgrade and would put up at our flat to avoid having to register in a hotel. The master-spy duly arrived, self-enveloped in an aura of mystery and urgency, and held a number of conferences with Sandy and other members of the British community whom I had hitherto innocently regarded as mere business men.

I kept discreetly in the background, but next afternoon Sandy came into my office at the Legation, looking distinctly worried.

" The Chief," he said, " has asked me for a note on the situation in Albania. Of course it's got to be different from what the F.O. give him. I know nothing about the beastly place and wondered if you could help me."

Until that moment I had hardly given the country a thought, but I was bored with the routine of office life, and longed for bigger game than the Belgrade editors.

" Yes, of course," I answered. " I'll try and let you have a short memo. on the latest trends by dinner tonight."

For a moment, after the door had closed behind him, I was at a loss to know how to begin, and cursed my irresponsibility. Then, deciding to make the best of the situation, I rang up Ralph Parker, the correspondent of *The Times*, to see if he knew any Albanians.

" Yes," came his imperturbable reply, " I know two. If it's really urgent I'll try and get them round for a drink this evening."

Accordingly, at six o'clock, I repaired to Parker's flat and there was introduced, as a fellow journalist, to Gani and Said Kryeziu. They were the first Albanians I had ever met. Our conversation lasted perhaps an hour; and when it was over I returned to the Legation and there concocted a short memorandum on the Albanian situation. At Sandy's request I handed this to " the Chief" at dinner, modestly expressing the hope that it might " throw some more light on the general picture ". The great man glanced thoughtfully at the paper and announced that he would take it to study in Athens, where he was going next day. From the Greek capital he penned a despatch to London which, among other doubtless more profound observations, contained the following statement:

". . . Our staff in Belgrade would be greatly strengthened by the co-option of Julian Amery, whose expert knowledge of Albanian affairs would be an invaluable asset to the organisation."

" God moves in a mysterious way ! "

The " D " Organisation, of which I thus became a member, was the creation of a resourceful major of the Sappers, gifted with unusual powers of arousing enthusiasm in his subordinates, but fated, like so many pioneers, to be spurned by an ungrateful government. His object, in the highest degree original, and wholly distinct from that of the secret Intelligence Service, was the " subversion ", in enemy and neutral territories throughout the world, of the war effort of the Axis powers. By " subversion " was meant those operations against the enemy which lay outside the special province of the armed forces and the departments of state: the sabotage, for example, of his factories, rolling-stock, or purchases in neutral countries; the fomenting of discontent and insurrection among his people and their satellites; the exposing of his representatives abroad to ridicule or opprobrium; in short every measure, fair or foul, which might conduce to the embarrassment of his friends or the comfort of his foes. At the time of which I am writing, the " D " Organisation was still very limited in size and so secret that even our diplomatic representatives were kept in ignorance of its exact activities and personnel. Later, in connection with our support of the Resistance Movements, it was to grow to monstrous size, and to find establishment for half a dozen generals and a galaxy of civil advisers and staff officers of all three services.

Our chief and prophet in Belgrade was Julius Hanau, an arms dealer of wide and varied experience, steeped in the cultures of France and Germany, learned in history and endowed with all the power of his race to compel imagination. The Balkans held few secrets for him; and it was in his hands that the threads of our network throughout the peninsula came together. The word " impossible " was not in his dictionary, and once he had approved a plan he gave us a free hand in its execution. At the same time he had the prudence of the serpent and laid down as his often-repeated maxim: " I want live heroes, not dead ones, and if there must be dead ones then let them be Germans ". " Caesar " was the pseudonym selected for him by the combination of his first name and appearance: there was also a spark of genius in him to justify the choice.

It was Caesar who now asked me to start a small Albanian section, designed in the first instance to study the situation in Albania and to prepare plans for " D " operations there should Italy join our enemies. My colleague in this task was John Bennett, a wild man, gaunt and loose-limbed, who combined understanding with enduring enthusiasms and was to play a significant part in the events leading up to the military *coup d'état* which ranged Yugoslavia on the side of the Allies. Without knowledge or experience of things Albanian, we started with no qualification save that of being unprejudiced. In response, however, to our requests, memoranda, statistics, and guide-books slowly trickled in from London; and the Yugoslav General Staff, at this time still pro-Allied, kept us informed of the Italian order of battle in Albania and showed us the latest staff maps which they had seduced from Mussolini's cartographers.

Geography showed us that Albania could be approached by land from Greece as well as Yugoslavia. An Albanian office, similar to our own, was therefore opened in Athens, with Mrs. Hazluck, Edith Durham's friend, as its adviser. Mrs. Hazluck was one of those remarkable Englishwomen who make their homes in strange lands and gain the affection and respect of their inhabitants. She had crossed the Albanian border in 1919 in the course of anthropological researches in Macedonia, and, attracted by the country and its people, had made her permanent home near Elbasan. Her chief interest was folk-lore, but the Italians suspected that she was a spy, and expelled her from Albania in 1939. By so doing they threw her, for the first time, into the arms of the Secret Service.

From Belgrade and Athens we extended our lines of physical approach to Albania by establishing representatives at Salonika and Skoplje. The latter still had a large Albanian population, and was to be an observation post of great importance. There we sent Ralph Parker, the Belgrade correspondent of *The Times*, who resigned from that newspaper to devote himself to our work. Parker was a trained observer and a resourceful man, and already had some experience of "underground" work in Prague, where he had helped to rescue a number of Czechs from the Gestapo in 1939. With him went Fred Lawrence, a rugged individualist who had once spent a holiday in Albania.

The Balkan Peninsula had been assigned to the operational theatre of the Allied armies in the Middle East, so that obvious considerations of strategy required the appointment to General Wavell's staff in Cairo of an officer conversant with our affairs. This task was allotted to Major Cripps, a former instructor of the Albanian gendarmerie, who loved the country and spoke its curious monosyllabic tongue. Finally we sought and obtained the appointment of Colonel Frank Stirling to co-ordinate and supervise our several activities and to keep in touch with the Albanian exiles in Constantinople. Stirling had been military adviser to Lawrence in the Arab Revolt, and, after the first World War, had raised a team of British instructors to train the Albanian gendarmerie. Later he had reorganised the Albanian administration and had remained as an adviser to King Zog until the crisis in Anglo-Italian relations caused by the Abyssinian War made his position in an Italian sphere of influence untenable. In his youth he had governed a district in the Sudan and been a famous horseman; later, on his return to England from Albania, he had worked successively as a shopwalker in a chain store at thirty shillings a week, and as military adviser to a film magnate for a prince's ransom. The wealth of his experience had not damped his zest for adventure, and an eminent Greek statesman once described him as "the ideal uncle for a boy king". He was to be our chief counsellor and support, for he knew the ways of the Balkans and was, besides, in Wavell's confidence.

Such was the British framework of our Albanian organisation, but, while it was still in the making, we also sought for ways and means of coming into touch with potential supporters in Albania. In this delicate operation we took counsel from Yovan Jonovitch, a Yugoslav political leader and a great friend of the Allies, who was to play a leading part in preparing the ground for the revolt against Prince Paul in which Yugoslavia "found her soul". Jonovitch had once been Yugoslav Minister in Tirana, where he had done much to counteract the growth of Italian influence in the years before the Italo-Yugoslav *rapprochement*. He was at this time in opposition, but had kept in contact with the chief Albanian exiles, among whom we were to find our most valuable allies. As a Montenegrin Jonovitch was well versed in the ways of the Albanians, and I spent many hours learning from him of the general conditions of the country and something of its factions and leading men.

Foremost among the Albanian exiles in Belgrade was Gani Bey Kryeziu, a brother of Tsena, who had made the revolution of 1924 with Zog and had later been murdered in Prague under mysterious circumstances. Gani had escaped to Yugoslavia after his brother's assassination and there had served an attachment with the Yugoslav army. We were told that when he first came to Belgrade he had been considered something of a playboy, but with years he had become "serious" — those who have lived in the Balkans will appreciate the full significance of the word — and, some said, ambitious too. I had first met Gani and his brother, Said, in Parker's flat, on the occasion of my first excursion into Albanian affairs, and had liked them both from the start. Gani was short and fair, with a frank expression and distinctly military bearing. He was a man of few words, and, when he chose to speak, clear and concise rather than eloquent. He impressed us at once by his accuracy, especially in military matters, and by his refusal to bargain in negotiations. This indeed was so unusual in a Balkan politician that I was at first concerned by it, as if an attitude so open must conceal a doubly tortuous design. Gani's younger brother, Said, was tall, dark, and altogether more oriental in appearance. He had studied at the École des Sciences Politiques, spoke excellent French and had read widely, especially of the Marxist writers. Seemingly a cynic, Said was at heart a passionate believer in social-democracy. He made no efforts to conceal his sympathy for the Left-Wing movements of the Balkans and showed a rare prescience of the part they would play before the war was out. Both brothers were moved by a common hatred of the Italians, and, if Gani was the soldier, Said was the diplomat of the family. There was besides a third brother, Hassan, older than Gani but well content to leave the leadership of the clan in his brother's more capable hands. Hassan was an old-fashioned highland chief, and, while his brother worked among the politicians in Belgrade, he remained on the family estates to preserve the local influence of the clan.

The Kryezius had a powerful following in the region of Jakova, on both sides of the Albanian-Yugoslav border; and among the Ghegs, where such is the criterion of importance, they were said to be worth two thousand rifles at short call. Despite the long years of their exile they had kept abreast of developments in their country by means of an elaborate courier system, operating between their estates in the Kossovo and their friends in Albania proper. They welcomed the prospect of British support in their struggle against the Italians; and, with the help of their couriers, we were soon receiving regular reports of the situation in North Albania.

To open communication with Southern (Tosk) Albania was the work of the Athens office; but it remained for us, from

000 Belgrade, to make contact with the Catholic chiefs of the north-western districts, whose clansmen were reputed the fiercest warriors among the Ghegs. Our efforts to do so were for some time frustrated by Italian precautions and the strength of anti-Slav feeling among the Catholic highlanders; but, after weeks of careful enquiry, our good friend, Jonovitch, found a way round these seemingly insuperable obstacles. This was personified by Colonel Radonitch,[1] a Montenegrin of the hybrid tribe of Kutchi, whose clansmen, half Orthodox and half Catholic, live on both sides of the border that separates Albania from Montenegro. The Colonel arranged with certain practised smugglers among his clansmen to guide our agents across the border and bring them to the Catholic chiefs in the North and as far as Mirdita. Their reports, however, were discouraging; the Catholic tribes enjoyed a privileged position under the Italians; and we soon understood that their allegiance to the Duce would only be shaken by a closer prospect of Allied victory than the events of 1940 could afford.

The first stage of our work was completed by the opening of similar lines of communication with Albania from Skoplje, Salonika, and Athens; and within six weeks we were receiving regular reports from every part of the country. These showed that the people were impatient of foreign rule and friendly disposed to the Allies, though still uncertain of our victory. In the mountains the tribal chiefs encouraged our approaches, promising and asking much; in the towns men cursed the Italians sullenly, but were cowed.

The collation of such intelligence was useful in itself and as a trial of the quality of our organisation. It was, however, only a means to an end; and we now began to consider what targets in Albania might deserve our attention. We were thus engaged when Hitler's Panzer divisions rolled through the Ardennes and the long-awaited test of strength between the contending Powers began. The peoples of the Balkans watched the fortunes of the battle intently, but, with the fall of France — the protectress of the Little Entente and the ally of the Salonika Front — a great fear swept over them, and many forsook the common cause. It is to the everlasting credit of the Albanian leaders that in this darkest hour they scornfully rejected the fair proposals of the Italian Government. Others might turn back but they stood firm beside us, manfully resolved to free their country with our help or to die in the attempt. 000

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[1] After the German occupation of Yugoslavia Radonitch joined Tito's Partisans. He served with them for a year, but, mistrusting Tito's political intentions, went over to Mihailovitch. He was killed in 1945 during the Chetnik retreat through Bosnia in the last stages of the Yugoslav civil war.

Italy was now in the war; and, as the summer advanced, 669* we could no longer doubt that our enemies intended to sub- 648 jugate the Balkans. We[1] were therefore instructed to prepare plans for neutralising Albania as a base for Italian attacks against Yugoslavia or Greece. Albania itself contained few technical installations or other nerve-centres whose sabotage would seriously hinder the enemy; but Italian armies advancing thence into the Balkans must depend for their communications on the Albanian roads. These ran through some of the most rugged country in Europe, and beside them lived a race of men who looked on guerilla warfare as their natural calling. We therefore decided to work upon the Albanians so that, when the time came, they would rise in revolt and close the mountain roads against the Italian armies.

A first step was to form an Albanian revolutionary movement which would include as many enemies of Italy as we might persuade to work together. It was still too early to launch such a movement inside Albania, for the Albanians were not yet ready to receive its leaders, nor able to protect their operations. Instead we thought it wiser, as Zog and Tsena had done in 1924, to build up the necessary organisation in Yugoslavia. There we might lay our plans undisturbed, equip a striking force of Kossovars, and accumulate war material while our agents prepared the ground across the border. The revolt might thus be securely mounted on neutral soil and carried into Albania when the Balkan campaign began.

The Kossovo seemed to be the natural starting-point for the revolt, being an extension of Albania within the political frontiers of Yugoslavia. Many of its inhabitants were united

[1] [Cf. cat 116, pp. 25-28, for information on British intelligence organization to which author belonged -- Analyst]

*669 648 by family ties to the tribesmen across the border and were thus exceptionally placed to smuggle arms, agents, or propaganda into Albania. Moreover, a force of Kossovars acting as the spearhead of the rising would not be resisted as an invasion but fraternally acclaimed as a liberating army. The support of the Kossovars were thus essential to our plans, but most of their leaders inclined towards the Axis Powers, who had promised to unite the region to Albania. Gani alone supported the Allies, so that the Kryeziu family became the natural rallying point for our movement. Indeed, long before we had come on to the scene, Gani had taken steps to organise those Albanians who had taken refuge in Yugoslavia in 1939 from the Italians. In response to Italian pressure, most of them had been confined to remote villages of Bosnia and Voivodina, but Gani provided for their needs and interceded in Belgrade on their behalf. The majority of these exiles were army officers and monarchists, and, although they were glad of Gani's help and money, they were naturally suspicious of the Kryezius as enemies of the King. Gani therefore suggested that, to make sure of their wholehearted support, we should send to Turkey for Abas Kupi, the defender of Durazzo and the most popular of the monarchist leaders.

186 159 Abas Agha Kupi, or Bazi Sani as the tribesmen called him, could neither read nor write: indeed only with difficulty could he sign his name. Born in the nineties, he was, like Skanderbeg, a native of Kruya, where his father had been a respected member of the Bektashi community. One of his uncles had been a passionate Albanian nationalist and had fired the boy's imagination by tales of Turkish prisons and guerilla war. One day, when young Abas was but fifteen years old, nationalist insurgents seized Kruya and hoisted Skanderbeg's flag — the black eagles on the red ground — upon the castle tower. The boy went out to join them, but they told him that he was too young to fight and sent him home in tears. A few days later the town was reoccupied by "loyalist" troops under Essad Pasha, who at once gave orders to pull down the offending flag and restore the Star and Crescent. A soldier climbed on to the tower to carry out the order, but young Abas snatched up his

father's rifle and shot the man dead. Astonishment or sympathy covered his escape ; and he fled to the mountains to hide from Essad's revenge. The Pasha, however, was impressed by the boy's daring, and still more by the success with which he evaded or repelled his pursuers. He resolved to make use of him ; paid the blood money for the soldier's death ; and admitted Abas to his following. The young man thus became one of the " Essadist " leaders, and during the first World War raised a guerilla band with which he harassed the communications of the Austrian army. In the troubled times which followed the war he took sides with Mustafa Kruya against Zog and was declared an outlaw by the Tirana Government. For two years he defied the Zogist forces in the mountains of Kruya, until in 1924 Fan Noli and Mustafa drove Zog into exile and themselves seized power. Abas Kupi had set great hopes on the new regime, but they were disappointed ; and when Zog and Tsena in their turn attacked the Government he refused to come to its help. Instead he remained in Kruya, a spectator of the civil war.

Zog had learnt to respect this illiterate guerilla genius, and, in the hopes that the poacher might turn gamekeeper, offered him the command of the Kruya region. Abas Kupi accepted and from that time became Zog's devoted lieutenant ; nor were their relations darkened by the jealousy which, in politics, so often destroys the friendships of able men. Abas Kupi recognised that his ignorance barred him from the highest offices ; and the king felt safe to reward the subject without fear of raising the rival. In Kruya, however, Abas ruled as dictator, untrammelled by the control of the Central Government. His administration was popular ; and he preserved an exceptional degree of law and order in the district, mainly thanks to a private intelligence service, so widespread in its ramifications that he was often able to restrain potential malefactors by disclosing foreknowledge of their designs. It is said that, during the celebrations which attended the King's marriage, two visiting dignitaries — tribal chiefs from the North — were robbed in a Tirana café. Abas Kupi was informed and at once summoned the chief pickpockets of the city to his office. Within half an

186 hour he had extracted from them the identity of the criminals and the fruits of the crime. By a gentleman's agreement there were no prosecutions, but the victims were fully reimbursed, with ten per cent interest for their trouble.

On Good Friday of 1939 King Zog entrusted Abas Kupi with the defence of Durazzo. His forces only consisted of a battalion of Albanian gendarmes and some tribal levies but, although hopelessly outmatched in man-power and in guns, he kept two of the Duce's divisions at bay for more than thirty-six hours. This gallant action, the only effective resistance offered to the Italian invasion, covered the King's escape and made [538] Abas Kupi a national hero. Indeed, as we learned from our agents, the mountain bards had ~~already~~ added verses celebrating his defence of Durazzo to the long epic poem in which the great exploits of Albanian history are recorded.

*669 Gani's advice that we should seek the help of Abas Kupi seemed to us sound, and we therefore asked Stirling to approach him, for he had known him well in Albania. Accordingly, a few days after the capitulation of France, the two met in the dingy lodgings which Abas had taken in Constantinople. The Albanians are usually given to prolonged ceremonial greetings, but, although it was five years since he had last seen Stirling, Abas Kupi asked at once:

" Will you English fight on ? "

" I give you my word we will," Stirling answered.

" Thank God," said Abas Kupi, " for now the Italians are at last fair game for both of us." Then, his mind at rest, he remembered his manners and, with a smile, produced the customary greetings and enquiries: " *Tungjatjeta! A je mirë? A je shendosh? A je burri fortë?* " (" May your life be prolonged! Are you well? Are you in good heart? Are you a strong man? ")

After devious transactions the necessary passports were obtained and Abas Kupi was brought to Yugoslavia. At our first meeting I was struck, as others have been, by his pronounced likeness, especially in profile, to certain of the portraits of Napoleon; a likeness accentuated by a lock of hair brushed forward on his forehead to hide the deep scar of a bullet wound sustained in the days when he had fought against Zog. Although illiterate, the man was no peasant, but delicately made and with all the grace of movement of a mountaineer. He spoke little, but with a charm of expression and gesture and a warmth of tone which overcame the impersonality of interpreted conversation. From the start he agreed to work whole-heartedly with Gani; and, despite their different views on the subject of the monarchy, the two became fast friends. Abas Kupi made his home with the Kryezius; and, in the intervals of their conspiracies, Said spent much of his time translating the newspapers to him and the broadcasts from Allied stations. 669*

We ƒ had broadened our movement to the Right by including Abas Kupi and the monarchist exiles; now, on Said's advice, we took in Mustafa Jinishi, a member of the Communist Party and a brilliant propagandist. Paris had been the main centre of the Albanian Communists, but, though we did not know it, the Germans had already deported most of their leaders back to Albania. There, the Fascist government let them remain at large, for at this time the Communist Parties throughout the world were still denouncing our struggle with Nazi Germany as an imperialist war. The influence of the Albanian Communists was reputed insignificant, but we were glad to have Mustafa Jinishi for his personal qualities and earnestly hoped that his willingness to work with us might be a sign of a change of heart in Moscow. [665]

Our movement might now be justly termed a United Front of Albanian resistance to Italy. Indeed Abas Kupi, Gani Kryeziu, and Mustafa Jinishi represented, in so far as a people as profoundly anarchic as the Albanians could be said to have representatives at all, the chief factions among the *émigrés* and in Albania, which were prepared to fight for their country's freedom. These three men had been at daggers drawn until a few days before; now, thanks to British intervention and Said Kryeziu's patient diplomacy, they had come together to fight against their common enemy. The sole basis, however, of their alliance was the Italian occupation of their country, which barred them equally from all hope of power. They became great personal friends, but they would sometimes tell us that,

ƒ[British Intelligence. Cf. cat. 11b, pp 25-28 -- Analyst]

*669 as soon as they had driven the Italians from Albania, they would turn and rend one another. We smiled indulgently at such prophecies; not only out of scepticism but because, in the summer of 1940, the headaches of victory still seemed very remote.

Our chief concern at the time was for the leadership of the movement. Gani Kryeziu, as he himself admitted, had been too long in exile to assume the role of leader inside Albania, while Abas Kupi seemed barred from it by his illiteracy. To [643] our surprise, however, Gani suggested that King Zog was the obvious choice, both by virtue of his personal ability and because, in a country as factious as Albania, the proud chiefs would more readily gather round the man whom they had once acknowledged as king than round some self-appointed leader. Abas Kupi somewhat naturally shared this view and so indeed did Mustafa Jinishi, who explained that his friends could wait for the defeat of Italy to settle their accounts with the King. This unexpected identity of views convinced us that Zog would make the best leader for the Albanian revolt; and we urged that arrangements be made to bring him in touch with the movement in Belgrade. The Foreign Office, however, hesitated to sanction any step which might commit us to the King's cause, so that the leadership of the United Front remained undefined.

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648 The United Front was the fruit of long hours spent in patient planning in the extra-territorial security of the Legation and in conspiratorial meetings in dark corners of Belgrade. We changed these meeting-places continually, but our favourite was a deserted flat on the top story of a tall, modern building in the Kralya Milana. It was unfurnished, except for a rickety table and two benches abandoned by the owner; but through its dusty windows we could look out over the city to the Sava valley and the plain beyond. The climate of conspiracy is naturally productive of suspicions, and we used to take infinite precautions to preserve the secrecy of our meetings with the Albanian leaders. We would approach the rendezvous by devious routes; change taxis on the way; or leave our cars

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outside some other door. The Italians were indeed on our trail, but it would seem that we overrated the efficiency of their agents. Some months later, when I had left Yugoslavia and was living in Constantinople, I was shown an intercepted Italian intelligence report: it stated that I had secretly returned to Belgrade, gave my spurious name and supposed address, and added that I was disguised by a beard! The weather was already turning cold and I could not help pitying the wretched O.V.R.A. agent who was detailed to watch my doubtless innocent double. But besides the O.V.R.A. we had also to dodge the Yugoslav political police; for, since the fall of France, Prince Paul's first object was to avoid anything which might provoke the anger of the Axis Powers. From time to time the Yugoslav Foreign Minister would protest against our activities among the Albanian exiles, but Sir Ronald Campbell was able to reassure him in all sincerity; for our relations with the diplomatic staff were governed by the ancient precept: " Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth ".

The Albanian leaders were of exemplary discretion, but the same could not always be said of their followers. One afternoon I returned with Sandy Glen from lunch to find two or three hundred Albanian wood-cutters, variously armed with axes and knives, grouped outside the Legation. A few of them were in earnest consultation with John Bennett, who presently discovered what was afoot. Someone, it seemed, had told them that the British would pay them a hundred dinars apiece to wreck the Italian Legation, and, like prudent men, they had come to collect their money in advance!

Nevertheless the work made progress. Our couriers passed from the Kossovo into Albania, preaching the aims of the United Front among the tribal chiefs, and gathering political and military information. Soon we were in communication with Muharrem Bairaktar, the lord of Liuma, who promised his support. Next, as propaganda, we began to send waggon-loads of corn across the border to distribute among our potential supporters. Later, rifles and ammunition were concealed beneath the corn. Thus, bit by bit, the United Front was extended to Albania and the ground was prepared for revolt.

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Indeed by July the enrolment of supporters had outstripped our capacity to supply them from the stock of weapons locally available; and we saw that it was only by drawing on the arsenals of the Middle East that we might hope to appease their insatiable hunger for arms.

The petty arms traffic we had thus far indulged in had been made possible by the help of friendly Yugoslav officials, acting on their own initiative. We could not hope, however, to run consignments of rifles from the Middle East into Albania without the knowledge and at least the tacit approval of the Yugoslav Government. We had, indeed, counted on some measure of Yugoslav support; for the Albanian revolt had always been considered as a part of the general scheme for the defence of the Balkans against an attack by the Axis Powers. It now appeared that the Belgrade Government were too demoralised by enemy pressure to countenance our plans; and we even began to doubt whether they intended to resist the Germans at all. Accordingly some of us, myself among them, turned increasingly to the task of building up the forces of resistance in Yugoslavia. Thus four years were to go by before I was once more concerned with things Albanian.

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In August 1940 the direction of the Belgrade branch of the [625] Albanian organisation was entrusted to Lieut.-Colonel Oakley-Hill, who had been for some years an officer in the Corps of Instructors to the Albanian gendarmerie. Hill's name, as we were to learn from personal experience, was a household word among the Ghegs, thanks to his rare command of the Albanian language and his genuine affection for the Albanians. He already knew many of the leading exiles in Belgrade and soon won their confidence by his sincerity and tireless industry on behalf of the Albanian cause. Thus, under his guidance, the work was advanced.

The Albanians had been demoralised by the fall of France, but the reports which reached Belgrade in September showed

that they had rallied with the news of the Luftwaffe's defeat in 669*
the Battle of Britain; a trend that was maintained with the 648
growing certainty that the British Government meant to fight to the end. Men's minds were therefore receptive to the idea of revolt, but without arms they could not pass from ideas to action. In default of arms, money was sent across the border to maintain the goodwill of the clans and also in the hope that, by the natural operation of the law of supply and demand, it might lead to the discovery of unknown arsenals. The return, however, was small in comparison with the outlay; and the absence of concealed supplies of weapons was presently attested by the rise in the price of rifles. Meanwhile Prince Paul's Government, strong only in its determination to appease the Axis Powers, began actively to disrupt the work of the United Front. To please the Italians they expelled Parker from Skoplje; confined Abas Kupi to Sarajevo; and forbade the Kryeziu brothers to visit their estates in the Kossovo. In the face of these restrictions Oakley-Hill had no choice but to beguile the impatience of the exiles as best he might and wait upon events.

On 4th November 1940, to the dismay of the British, and, 721
as it now appears, the displeasure of the Germans, the Italian armies in Albania invaded Greece. The Duce thus sought a military solution to the Balkan problem; but though Roman in its inspiration, his plan proved singularly Italian in its execution. The ragged Greek soldiery, for years the butt of journalists because of a supposed dislike of fighting in the rain, surprised and routed the vanguard of the Italians in the defiles of the Pindus. The vaunted Alpini and Bersaglieri were hurled back in disorder into Albania. The Italian *débâcle* assumed spectacular proportions; Korcha, Pogradets, Gjinocastro, Saranda, and Himara fell in turn; Valona was threatened; and for a moment it seemed that the Italians would be driven into the Adriatic. R.A.F. machines appeared in Greece; and, with rumours of a new British Expeditionary Force, British stocks rose once more throughout the Balkans.

The Albanians believed that their freedom was at hand. 000

*669 The Albanians believed that their freedom was at hand.

648 On the front[1] the Greek troops were everywhere acclaimed as liberators, and whole Albanian units went over to them from the Italian armies. From London King Zog offered his sword to the King of the Hellenes. In Belgrade the United Front prepared to launch a general revolt which, in subjunction to a Greek offensive, might engulf the Italian armies in irretrievable disaster. The Albanians put forward no political conditions: all that they hoped was to free their country and preserve its independence; all that they asked was that some thousands of rifles with ammunition be sent from Salonika to the United Front in Belgrade. The rifles were available, and the Yugoslav Government, suddenly emboldened by the example of the Greeks, hinted that they would turn a blind eye to their passage. The plans for the revolt were approved in London and the British Military Mission in Athens were instructed to urge them upon the Greek General Staff. The Greeks, however, alternating between extremes of confidence at the prospects of their forthcoming offensive and of discouragement at the condition of their equipment, argued that Greek troops would use the rifles better than Albanian irregulars. Some of them, moreover, cherished ambitions of annexing the region variously known as Southern Albania or Northern Epirus, and were perhaps reluctant to take any step which might make them beholden to the Albanians. The plans for revolt were therefore shelved; and the natural distress of the Albanian leaders was deepened by the Hellenising policies which the Greek administration pursued in the occupied Albanian territories. The final Greek offensive was held by the Italians, though not without great difficulty, along a line of fortified positions originally built in the time of King Zog. The line had been considerably reinforced by the Italians, but there were British military observers who believed that it might well have been carried if guerillas could have impeded its supply in the critical moments of the battle.

The Italians thus stabilised their front in Albania; and, as the spring of 1941 wore on, the situation in the Balkans steadily
000 deteriorated. The infiltration of German troops into Roumania and Bulgaria assumed the proportions of occupation; and it

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[1] [In the Winter of 1940--Analyst]

soon appeared that the Germans intended to crush Greek re- 000
sistance by an invasion from the north-east. Surrounded on all sides by hostile armies, the weak but discerning Regent of Yugoslavia prepared to yield to German demands; but he misjudged the generous temper of the Serbian nation; and before he could hand them over to their hereditary enemies a group of determined officers borne on the tide of a whole people's wrath swept him and his defeatist entourage from power. The new Yugoslav Government understood that war with Germany was certain, but they regarded the prospect with some confidence, for their army was considered the best in the Balkans. Men still remembered that little Serbia had resisted the might of the Austrian Empire for more than two years, and the news that a British army had landed at Salonika encouraged the hope that history would repeat itself. Moreover, the Greek victories in the Pindus supported the belief that the valour of a warlike people fighting in defence of their own soil was still a match for the superior equipment of invaders.

Unlike the Greeks, the new Yugoslav Government and their 669
military advisers set great hopes on an Albanian revolt. Sur- 648
rounded as they were to almost the full extent of their land frontiers by German and Italian armies, they were wholly dependent for their communications with the British on the railway which runs through Macedonia to Salonika. The enemy were concentrated on either side of it, in Bulgaria and Albania, and at any moment by a successful attack might cut this precious life-line and seal off Yugoslavia from the outside world. In this unenviable situation they naturally welcomed a project which might prevent an Italian eruption into Macedonia and would perhaps enable their own armies to take the offensive. To attack the Italians in Albania, indeed, appealed to the Yugoslavs especially; for, by joining hands with the Greeks and opening communications with the British through the Adriatic Sea, they might hope to prolong their resistance and would at least assure their retreat.

The Yugoslav General Staff thus gave its blessing to the aims of the United Front and, in the midst of the chaos which it had inherited, sought to give the Albanian leaders such

*669 648 help as it could. But in Belgrade all was confusion; for, though the military revolt had stimulated the patriotism of the masses, it had finally distracted an administration already demoralised and never efficient. Precious time was lost before the Albanian exiles could be assembled from the remote villages to which they had been banished; no transport could at first be found to take them to the Kossovo; and when at last they reached Jakova they were arrested as fifth columnists by the local corps-commander. Thanks to Oakley-Hill they were speedily released, but it was only to find that Gani's tribesmen, who were to have formed the spearhead of the revolt, had been called up and drafted to the Northern front.

The Albanian leaders were still struggling to obtain facilities from a command floundering in a morass of conflicting instructions when the Germans bombed Belgrade and the invasion began. That same evening they were joined by Said Kryeziu, who had remained in the capital up to the outbreak of hostilities: with him came a special liaison officer from the General Staff who at last regularised their position with the Corps Commander, and made it possible for them to begin their work. Unprepared though they were, the Albanian leaders had seen enough of Corps Headquarters and decided not to wait for a problematical increase of strength. Accordingly, on the evening of 7th April, Gani, Said, and Hassan Kryeziu, Abas Kupi and Mustafa Jinishi crossed the border into Albania with a force of barely three hundred men. With them marched Oakley-Hill.

669 They met with no initial resistance from the Italians and were well received by the local population. The enthusiasm of the tribesmen, however, was tempered by their doubts as to the outcome of the main struggle; and recruits were slow to come in. Nevertheless they soon mustered more than a thousand men and with these advanced westward through the mountains into the Catholic regions of Nikai and Mertur. They twice engaged and defeated strong Italian patrols, and with growing forces pushed on to a point fifteen miles north of Scutari. The Catholic tribes, however, refused to rally to them; and, since they could not attack Scutari alone, they decided to fall back into Moslem territory. There they planned to establish a base 669 whence they might harass Italian traffic on the roads and resume communications with the Yugoslavs. It was during this withdrawal from Scutari that they heard first the rumours, and later the confirmation, of the catastrophe which had overwhelmed the Yugoslav armies. The enemy had broken through on every front; internal communications were disrupted; and whole armies had surrendered without fighting. The High Command had ceased to exist; King Peter and the Government had escaped to Athens; and the entire British Mission had been captured. There had been treachery, too, in high places: Croatia had declared for the Germans, a capitulation had been signed, and organised resistance was at an end. A week had sufficed to annihilate the Yugoslav army, and with it all the hopes that had been set on a Balkan Front.

Overnight, Hill and the leaders of the United Front ceased to be the vanguard of a powerful army and were transformed into a band of fugitives, trapped in the mountains of North Albania. Nor did their prestige long survive the news of the *débâcle*. Their men deserted; the price of food rose steeply; and presently, the local chiefs, fearful of Italian reprisals, abandoned a lost cause and bade them withdraw from their territory. In time they saw the writing on the wall, and, while they still had sufficient strength to command respect, took steps for the orderly dissolution of their movement. At a last council of war the leaders decided to disperse, each to the area where his personal influence might afford him most protection; and Gani undertook to try and smuggle Hill to Turkey to tell the Allies of their fate.

Gani and Said therefore made their way back to the neighbourhood of Jakova and cast around for means of arranging Hill's escape. For a time they hid him in Skoplje in the house of a friend, and then had him brought to Belgrade, where it was hoped that he might procure Turkish papers. The plan, however, failed, and many like it; and each day the prospect of escape receded as the Gestapo extended their control over the conquered city. At length Hill abandoned hope, and deciding that his presence in Belgrade only endangered his

*669 friends' lives without advancing the common cause, arranged an honourable surrender to the Germans through the good offices of the American Legation.

Italian armies had meanwhile occupied the Kossovo; and the Duce presently announced the reunion of the province with Albania. Kossovar opinion now became overwhelmingly pro-Italian and turned against the Kryeziu brothers, who were still in hiding near Jakova. Their names stood high on the Italian black-list; considerable rewards were offered for their capture; and it became known that the O.V.R.A. were on their trail. They decided, therefore, to take refuge in the German-occupied zone of Yugoslavia, where they might hope to avert suspicion by posing as Serb refugees from Croatia. They accordingly escaped from Jakova and passed the summer quietly, Said in hiding in Belgrade, and Gani and Hassan with Moslem friends in Bosnia. In the autumn Gani and Hassan rejoined Said; and, on their way to Belgrade, saw something of the Chetniks and Partisans who had just taken the field together against the Germans. Inspired by their example and believing that Kossovar enthusiasm for Italy was subsiding, the Kryeziu brothers now resolved to return to the Jakova mountains to organise an Albanian resistance movement.

There is a saying in the Balkans that behind every hero stands a traitor. The evening before the brothers left for Jakova, agents of the Gestapo came to their hide-out and took them away to the concentration camp at Zemun. Their identity was soon established and a few days later they were handed over to the Italian police. There followed a pilgrimage of Italian prisons, in each of which they were closely examined on the organisation of the United Front and their relations with the British. Several times they were subjected to third degree; twice they were told they would be shot; and once were even prepared for execution. They despaired of life; until one day the Italians tired of their interrogation and dismissed them to the notorious island concentration camp of Ventotteno. At Ventotteno, conditions were uncomfortable but the company was stimulating; some of the inmates had been there since the March on Rome; and every shade of anti-Fascist opinion was represented, often by its ablest exponents. The Russian revolutionaries used to say that prison was the greatest of universities; such was also to be the opinion of Gani and Said.

Meanwhile Abas Kupi and Mustafa Jinishi had set out towards the south after leaving the Kryeziu brothers. Their road skirted the hostile territory of Mirdita and traversed the ranges above the river Drin, which were in parts still deep in snow. Only three bodyguards went with them; and they travelled always by night, resting during the day in the woods or in friendly houses. It was indeed a dangerous journey; for the tribes on their way were unreliable and even their friends were reserved, lest hospitality to outlaws should incur Italian reprisals. Near Dibra they separated; Mustafa Jinishi pressing on south towards his home town of Korcha, while Abas Kupi turned west, and, passing through the Mati valley, made his way back to his own stronghold of Kruya.

The return of their hero was not long kept secret from the people of Kruya; and, though Abas Kupi might not enter the city itself because of its Italian garrison, he wandered freely through the mountain villages, accompanied by a growing escort. Many came out to see him to learn of his intentions, but he prudently kept his own counsel until he had fully informed himself of the changes brought by the Italians. At the same time he exerted himself to rally old friends and win new supporters, though rather by playing on their private hopes and jealousies than by any general appeal to political passions. The news of his return soon spread to Tirana; and one day a messenger from Mustafa Kruya — his former friend and Zog's bitterest enemy — came to his hide-out with proposals for a meeting.

Mustafa Kruya had returned to Albania after the Italian invasion and was at this time engaged in negotiations with the Viceroy for the formation of an Albanian " collaborationist " government. His spies had told him of Abas Kupi's reserve on political issues, and he had wishfully concluded that the Agha despaired of an Allied victory. He therefore determined to seek his friendship in the hope of lending a more patriotic

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colour to the government by including the defender of Durazzo among its members. The two men had once been great friends, but they had not seen each other since 1924, when Zog had driven Mustafa into exile. They now met at dead of night in a house on the outskirts of Kruya, each guarded by a powerful escort.

Mustafa was perhaps the cleverest Albanian of his time and spared no effort that evening to win the illiterate chieftain to his cause. He dangled before him all the temptations of power and office; played on the friendship which had united them in youth; and demonstrated, certainly beyond Abas's power of refutation, that the victory of the Axis Powers was certain. Finally, as if to build a bridge of words over which Abas Kupi might change sides with honour, he spoke of plans for winning back Albania's independence. He would yield to no one as a patriot and argued that his projected "collaboration" with the Italians was a necessary step to the fulfilment of their hopes of freedom. For nearly five hours Abas drew him out and craftily parried his questions, saying that he had come not to teach but to learn. At last he made to leave, pleading that he must be gone before the dawn. Mustafa held out his hand, and, still glowing from his own eloquence, said:

"Then I take it we shall work together."

With assumed gravity Abas Kupi replied: "I am ready to work even with you for the good of Albania, but not for the good of Italy!" Then spurning the proffered hand he called his bodyguard and was gone into the night.

The Agha had thrown off the mask, and now went out among the tribesmen openly preaching revolt against the Italians and the Tirana Government. Men came for miles to see him; and Mustafa, alarmed by his growing influence, declared him an outlaw and ordered the militia to destroy him. For weeks Abas Kupi derided their pursuit; but one evening, late in the autumn, he was surrounded in a lonely house in the Kruya mountains. Only six guards were with him, but Albanian houses are built for defence, and they managed to hold off their assailants until it was dark. Then, in a desperate sortie, they shot their way through the cordon of militiamen and escaped into the night, leaving two of their number dead. The Agha's popularity was only increased by his escape; and within a few weeks all Central Albania was taunting the Prime Minister with a mocking ditty which began: "*O! Mustafa! O! qeni zi!*" (O! Mustafa! O! thou black dog!)

The black dog, however, only renewed his efforts to destroy Abas Kupi. He reinforced the troops sent against him, hired assassins to second their operations, and even burned down the houses of those who sheltered him. At first the mountaineers had openly favoured Abas Kupi, vying with one another to ensure his safety and provide for his followers. The threat of reprisals, however, damped their generous enthusiasm; they demanded payment for the supplies they had previously brought as gifts; and at last they barred their doors against an outlaw. From a hundred men his bodyguard was now reduced to seven; hunger and the enemy kept them continually on the move; and they eked out a precarious existence, hiding in the woods or in the sheepfolds of loyal friends. Then winter came, blocking the mountain paths with snow, and the militia gave up the hunt. In a revolution, to survive is already a victory. Time worked for Abas Kupi; through the long winter months the tribesmen brooded on their wrongs and discussed his exploits round the hearth; and by the spring he had become the rallying-point for every malcontent in Central Albania.

Meanwhile Mustafa Jinishi had made his way to the neighbourhood of Korcha. There he soon came in touch with the Albanian Communist leaders, who had prudently taken to the mountains on learning of the German invasion of Russia. Their links with Moscow had been disrupted by the Balkan campaign and their chief concern was to re-establish communications with the Communists in Yugoslavia. Meanwhile they studied the Albanian situation carefully and pondered on the stories coming from Macedonia of Tito's Partisans, whose badge was the Red Star.

Of the rest of the Albanians who had crossed the border with Abas Kupi and the Kryeziu brothers, some returned to their

*669 homes and presently made their peace with the authorities, others were captured and interned; but the greater part remained discreetly in remote mountain villages, waiting upon events.

Thus the revolt of the United Front collapsed, its organisation was dissolved, and its leaders were dispersed and cut off from communication with their allies. To those of us who watched from outside, ignorant whether Abas Kupi or Gani Kryeziu even lived, it seemed that the whole of our work was destroyed. Yet, as the leaders were scattered, so the seed of revolt was sown, and in the fullness of time there was to be a harvest.

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In the summer of 1941, when the last hopes of a Balkan front had been dispelled by the German victories in Crete, Stirling was called away to more urgent duties in connection with the Arab World. His place in Constantinople was taken by Mrs. Hasluck, but otherwise the whole organisation which had grown up to promote an Albanian revolt was dissolved. For close on two years, therefore, the responsibilities of observing the Albanian situation, keeping touch with the exiles and seeking to re-establish communications with Albania devolved upon Mrs. Hasluck alone. The triple barrier of German, Bulgarian, and Italian counter-espionage proved a formidable obstacle to her efforts; and indeed informed opinion in the "D" Organisation long despaired of Albanian resistance. Mrs. Hasluck, however, remained convinced that a revolt was preparing in Albania, and worked tirelessly to glean information from the Albanian exiles and the rare Albanians who visited Constantinople. Also — and this was perhaps her greatest service — she despatched to Cairo a continuous series of reports, memoranda, and telegrams, which saved the increasingly bureaucratic headquarters of the "D" Organisation from altogether forgetting that Albania existed.

All attempts to establish a regular courier system between

Turkey and Albania failed, but from such scraps of information as had filtered through by the end of 1942, it seemed probable that there were guerilla bands in the Albanian mountains. Rumours reaching General Mihailovitch's headquarters lent colour to this view; but, in spite of repeated enquiries, it was not found possible to ascertain the names of the guerilla leaders, their political allegiance, or even the approximate regions in which they operated. 669* 648

Meanwhile, as the converging Allied armies closed in on the Axis forces in Tunisia, the British General Staff began revolving plans for military operations in Southern Italy and the Adriatic. It was therefore decided that the time had come to send a British Mission to Albania to find out what guerilla forces were there and to report upon their circumstances.

Such a Mission was fraught with difficulties and dangers, even when compared with such other missions as had already been sent to the resistance movements of Europe. As a rule, British liaison officers infiltrated into occupied territory were carefully briefed beforehand as to the general situation which would confront them, while their physical reception was usually prearranged with the local resistance forces. The "D" Organisation, however, were wholly in the dark as to the situation in Albania, and did not even know for certain whether an Albanian resistance movement existed at all. Thus, to the sufficient dangers of an incursion into enemy territory would be added the anxieties of a journey into the unknown.

Under such conditions the success of the Mission must in the main depend upon the choice of emissaries. Now there was no one available who combined the necessary youth with first-hand knowledge of Albania; and, by a process of selection as blind as it was fortunate, the lot fell upon Bill Maclean. Maclean was of Highland stock, tall and fair-haired, disguising a toughness of steel beneath an elegant and almost lackadaisical exterior. He was a natural guerilla leader, relying only on himself and gifted with a sure eye for ground and an instinctive insight into other men's intentions. Most at ease in extremes of violent action or dream-mastered sloth, he was spurred by love of adventure rather than by ambition and delighted in all 000

000 that was extravagant and strange. He had joined the Scots Greys in 1939 and, as a subaltern in Palestine during the Arab rising, had first seen guerilla warfare from the " receiving end ". Later he had served with Wingate in the Abyssinian revolt, and there had proved his worth as a leader of irregulars. Alone with a body of Amhara he had besieged an Italian army in Gondar for four months, and in the final assault had been the first to enter the city.

With Maclean went David Smiley, an officer of the Household Cavalry who had served in Abyssinia, Syria, and the Western Desert. Of sturdier build than his companion, there was no velvet glove over Smiley's claw. He knew his own mind and spoke it on all occasions, not aggressively nor even bluntly, yet in a manner so direct that it left little room for argument and no doubt whatever as to his feelings, his views, or his intentions. Seldom given to speculation, he lived firmly in the present, enjoying the good things of life and all that was agreeable or beautiful, though as an occasional patron rather than a connoisseur or devotee. He liked his friends and disliked his enemies, but otherwise was more interested in things than in men and found a rare satisfaction in organising a camp or testing the accuracy of a new weapon. Maclean regarded action as only one of the ingredients of adventure; Smiley lived for action alone and was happiest on a dangerous reconnaissance, or on those expeditions which gratified his passion for " blowing things up ". A crack cavalry officer, a skilful saboteur, and a resourceful man, Smiley supplied the technical knowledge and the capacity for taking pains which accounted for no small part of the Mission's success.

*669 648 The two officers[1] were instructed in the art of parachuting and the use of the latest demolition devices; and, since no man could say with any accuracy what lay before them, Mrs. Hasluck gave them a short, but, it appears, intensive course in Albanian customs, psychology, and folk-lore. Then, in April 1943, they were duly fitted out with submachine-guns and bags of gold to protect their persons and promote their policies and were taken to Derna, in Cyrenaica, the operational base for the Balkans. With them also went Garry Duffy, a sabotage expert from the

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[1] [Cf. category 116, pp. 49-50 --Analyst]

Royal Engineers, and Corporal Williamson of the Black Watch, their wireless operator. 669* 648

From Derna they were flown to Epirus and there were dropped to one of the British Missions which were already working with the Greek resistance movement. Albania was only a few miles away, but the Greeks knew nothing of the Albanian guerillas; and Maclean and Smiley therefore walked across the border to find them for themselves. They were [609] received in the villages with elaborate courtesy and hospitality, but met with none of the pro-Allied enthusiasm which had been the rule in Greece. Despite their strikingly Nordic appearance, they were presently detained as Greek spies and stood in danger of their lives until they had satisfied their captors that they were genuine British officers. Even then an atmosphere of suspicion surrounded them; they were conscious all the time of being watched; and yet their efforts to come into touch with the guerillas were baffled at every turn. At last one night they came face to face with a representative of the "Partisans"; he brought them to the guerilla camp; and gradually they discovered the true nature of the Albanian resistance movement.

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Two seeds of revolt had been planted in Albania: the United 669* Front, built up by British efforts and led by chiefs of proven valour; and a Communist cell, Russian instructed and composed of new men. The fortunes of war had cut them off in turn from their patrons, and for a long time they were no more than bands of wanted fugitives; a powerful ferment, but powerless of themselves. Revolutions are not made without leaders, but never by leaders alone. Some men indeed are always ready to risk their lives for their ideals, but the mass of a people will not defy their rulers unless the hopes of happiness which they set upon revolt are sharply stimulated by the goad of their present discontents. Now the Albanians experienced no violent crises of an economic or social nature such as nourished, and in large measure underlay, the resistance movements of Greece

*669 and Yugoslavia. The condition of their country was one of relative prosperity; for the Italian occupation had enriched the people, while the recovery of the Kossovo had made supplies of food plentiful and cheap. At the same time the endemic poverty of the Albanians was such that, having little to lose and small hope of acquiring wealth by lawful means, they welcomed disorder whenever it was attended by opportunities of plunder. [181] To this natural lawlessness occasioned by their poverty was added a proud people's impatience of foreign rule. If the Italians had been less in evidence, their occupation might have been more easily tolerated. As it was, the Albanians bitterly resented the intrusions into their daily lives of the ubiquitous *carabinieri*, whose efforts to enforce order among a people accustomed to anarchy were as unpopular as they were vain.

Besides these general causes of discontent, the one inherent in the circumstances of the Albanians, the other in the character of their conquerors, there were other influences making for unrest of a more local, if no less important, application. In [184] North Albania the mercenary factor in the economy of the tribes made revolt a constant possibility. So rugged indeed was their region, and so complete the absence of social or political inhibitions among them, that the Ghegs could always be provoked to insurrection whenever the expectations of victory or gain appeared commensurate to the risks involved. In South Albania the causes of discontent were of a more usual character and sprang from the naturally conflicting interests of the landless peasants and the *Beys* whose estates they worked. The wretched lot of the Moslem peasantry might be somewhat alleviated by the sense of belonging to the same community as their masters; but the religious distinction which separated the Orthodox *rayah* from the Islamised landowners only served to increase their class consciousness. These Orthodox peasants had long been ripe for revolt; and indeed Fan Noli had sought to exploit their discontent in the revolution of 1924. Now, however, for the first time they found effective leaders in the youth of the towns.

177 The spread of Italian influence during the reign of King
668 Zog had encouraged the growth of a new class of officials and

ABAS KUPI

(Photographed in exile, 1940)

GANI BEY KRYEZIU AS AN OFFICER IN THE ALBANIAN ARMY

(From a photograph taken in 1927)

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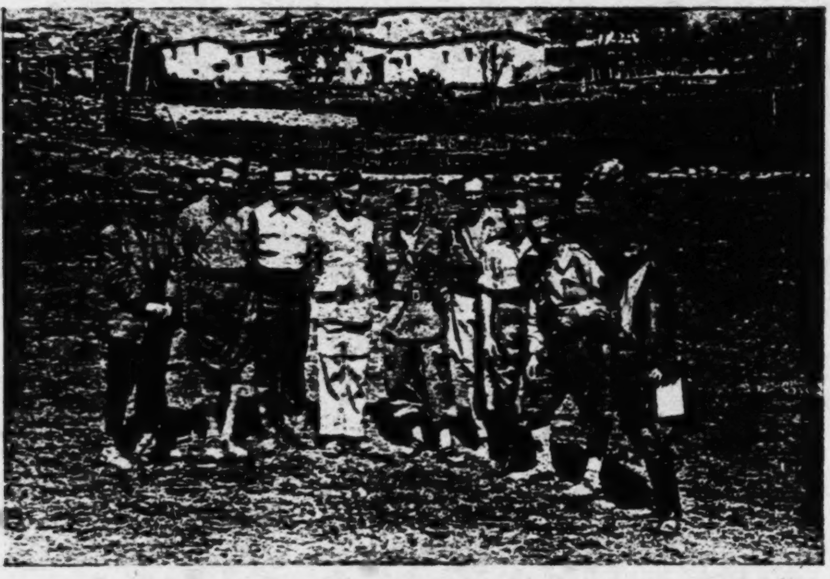

BRITISH MISSION AND PARTISAN LEADERS, SUMMER 1943

(*Left to Right*) Behar Shtylla, Enver Hoja, Duffy, Smiley, Spiro Moisi (Military Chief of Staff), Maclean, Hands, Ramadan Bacha, Dali Ndreu

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PARTISANS OF THE FIRST BRIGADE ON THE MARCH, SUMMER 1943

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merchants whose children had received a European education, either in the foreign schools that were introduced into Albania, or in their studies abroad. These young men had no roots in landed property or among the tribes and could find no outlet for their energies within the narrow limits of independent Albania such as the Ottoman Empire had offered earlier generations. They were thus peculiarly susceptible to the influence of revolutionary ideas. In other countries such young men often inclined to Fascism, but in Albania Fascism was the creed of the foreign overlord and, in their search for faith and discipline, they therefore turned to the Communists. It is unlikely that there were ever more than two, or at the most three, thousand of these young men, but they were to be the backbone of the Communist organisation and the leaders under whom the landless peasants were organised. The combined discontent of these two classes — the youth of the towns and the landless peasants — produced a social revolutionary movement, which presently won the support of many of the richer peasants as well by its appeal to their patriotism or their land-hunger. This, in turn, provoked the more conservative elements to combine for the defence of their own interests; and so the general unrest among the Tosks was increased.

*669 The general poverty of the Albanians, their resentment of foreign rule, the anarchy and mercenary economy of the Ghegs, and the growth of a crisis in social relationships among the Tosks were thus the conditions out of which the Albanian resistance movement grew. Its several parts, though mainly nourished by domestic discontents, were soon invested with a pro-Allied and anti-Axis character by leaders who were variously animated by the desire to free their country, the hope of obtaining foreign support, and the opportunity of exploiting the popular hatred of the Italians. For long these different movements were but armed bands of outlaws, more concerned with maintaining themselves than with attacking the enemy. Nevertheless, as the prestige of the Italians declined with the succession of their defeats, so more and more people grew convinced that there was less to be feared from resistance than there was to be gained. Then, with the help of British and Communist agents, *669 the operations of the bands assumed the form of a general revolt.

At the end of 1941 there were several small groups of outlaws in the Albanian mountains, of which the most important were that of Abas Kupi in the Kruya region and that of the Communist leaders near Korcha. The winter was, as always among highlanders, a time of preparation; and, with the spring of 1942, there appeared among the Tosks a number of "Partisan" units which all belonged to the same organisation. Mystery still surrounds the beginnings of the Albanian Partisan movement. The original instructions, however, for its formation, and the detailed plans for its constitution, were apparently brought to the Albanian Communist leaders by two emissaries of Tito who went under the pseudonyms of Ali and Miladin. By the summer of 1943 close liaison had been established between the Albanian and Yugoslav Partisans, and it was observed that Yugoslav representatives often exerted a decisive influence on the counsels of the Albanians.

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The leaders of the Albanian Partisans did not admit that their movement was Communist, although their rank and file habitually styled themselves as such. They presented themselves instead as a coalition of men of goodwill, dedicated to freeing Albania from foreign domination, purging the country of Fascist elements, and creating conditions in which the people might freely elect a government of their own choosing. In practice, exclusive control of the movement was retained in the hands of a small committee, all of whom were Communists. This committee, besides directing policy, appointed the guerilla commanders, the political commissars, and the regional organisers. The former were most often, and the two latter invariably, Communists; while, in accordance with the best conspiratorial traditions, all three were kept under observation by Party members who held no official position at all. By these methods, seconded by the salutary liquidation of those who disobeyed or disagreed, the Partisan movement presently achieved a degree of discipline and cohesion of which few observers believed Albanians to be capable. At an early stage the Red Star badge

669* and the clenched fist salute were introduced into their ceremonies; 665 an ingenious propaganda disseminated the usual adulation of Russia and denigration of all non-Communist elements; and the political and military structure of the movement reproduced, even in certain minute details, the pattern common to all the Communist guerillas in the Balkans and apparently evolved by the Party from experience in China and Spain.

The principal persons on the committee were Seifullah Maleshova, Enver Hoja, Ymer Dyshnitsa, and Mustafa Jinishi. Seifullah was of an older generation than the others and had been a member of the Party for more than twenty years. A brilliant propagandist and talented writer, he was popularly known as " the Red Poet ", and was in charge of the propaganda section of the movement. Years of exile and conspiracy, however, had sapped his energies and, despite his seniority, he was not to be the leader. This post was reserved for Enver Hoja, a schoolmaster from Korcha, still in his early thirties and possessed of rare organising ability. Ymer Dyshnitsa was a pliable young doctor of great personal charm and considerable culture: he had studied in France and Belgium and was the diplomat of the movement. Mustafa Jinishi had already played a part in the United Front in Belgrade and, despite occasional lapses from Stalinist orthodoxy, was the most popular leader with the rank and file by virtue of his ready wit and daring personal exploits.

669* The Partisans were essentially a Tosk movement, and at first recruited their forces mainly from the youth of the towns and the landless peasants. Later, they sought to extend their influence north of the Shkumbi, but there they looked in vain for similar elements from whom they might draw their strength. Instead they found a pastoral people, scarcely touched by Western, or indeed any, education, and loyal to their hereditary chieftains. Under these conditions the Communist leaders rightly decided that, unless they could win the support of some at least of these Gheg chiefs, they could not hope to make any progress in the North at all.

The most important of the Gheg guerilla bands was that of Abas Kupi, but there were also two strong groups in the regions

*669 of Peza and Martanesh. The first and stronger of these was led by Muslim Peza, the veteran Robin Hood of Albania, who had been ten years an outlaw, first against Zog and now against the Italians; the other by Baba Faya, a Bektashi abbot, whom the Italians had sought to arrest for his open denunciations of their rule. By appeals to their patriotism and promises of arms and gold, of which they stood in desperate need, Mustafa Jinishi persuaded these two veterans to join the Partisans. He then made his way north to confer with Abas Kupi, who readily agreed that they should make common cause against a common enemy.

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665 By gaining the support of these Gheg chiefs the Partisan movement acquired immense prestige throughout Albania, as well as a new respectability in the eyes of those who had hitherto been alarmed by the known Communist allegiance of its leaders. In September 1942, at a conference held at Peza, the several Partisan groups were for the first time formally embodied in a movement proclaimed under the name of *Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare* (National Liberation Movement), or L.N.C.,[1] as it will hereinafter be called. The leadership of the L.N.C. was vested in a Central Council of ten members, the most important of whom were the three Gheg chiefs, Abas Kupi, Muslim Peza, and Baba Faya, and the Communist leaders, Enver Hoja, Seifullah Maleshova, Mustafa Jinishi, and Ymer Dyshnitsa.

It seemed to many as if the Partisan movement had been broadened by the inclusion of non-Communists among its leaders. The real effect of the merger, however, was to enable the Communists to extend their influence among the Ghegs, without in any way limiting their full control over the Partisan movement among the Tosks. The three Gheg chiefs derived their strength from local influence; and had therefore to spend most of their time in their own districts, preserving the balance of power between the clans and holding together guerilla forces which, in their absence, would soon have dispersed. As a result they could seldom meet to confer and could not hope to attend

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[1] The L.N.C. was later more often known as F.N.C. (National Liberation Front). For the sake of convenience, however, I have preferred to retain the earlier description throughout.

the day-to-day deliberations of their fellow members of the 669*
Central Council. The real control of the movement was thus 665
left in the hands of the Communists, whose authority sprang solely from their party and whose mobility was untrammelled by territorial responsibilities. The Communists, moreover, soon gained control of the forces of Muslim Peza and Baba Faya. These two were guerilla leaders of the old school, brave in battle and cunning enough in business, but ignorant, lazy, and hard-drinking. Baba Faya indeed was an adventurer of purely mercenary talent, and Muslim, though a man of parts, was blinded by a fatal devotion to Mustafa Jinishi. They were thus easily persuaded to delegate more and more of their work, and with it of their power, to the political commissars attached to them by the Central Council. Abas Kupi alone preserved his independence. He refused to admit political commissars among his forces and treated those who were sent to him as no more than the Council's liaison officers. He attended personally to every detail of the organisation of his bands; and such was his distrust of human intentions in general, and those of the Communist Party in particular, that he deliberately sacrificed military efficiency rather than delegate his authority to men whose disloyalty or imprudence might permit the infiltration of Communist influence among his troops. He was careful, however, to avoid giving offence to his Communist colleagues; and they for their part were content to let him be a law unto himself so long as they could gain prestige for their movement and mask their own political affiliations by the use of his name.

Meanwhile the conservative elements among the Tosks had formed a resistance movement of their own, known as the Balli Kombetar, or National Union, which took the field against the Italians at the end of 1942. It was chiefly recruited from the landowners and their peasant following and from that part of the youth of the towns which had not joined the L.N.C. The policy of the Balli Kombetar was Republican, Liberal, and strongly Nationalist; and among its leaders were such men as Midhat Frasheri and Ali Klissura, who had been prominent opponents of King Zog. Until the end of 1942 the Ballist leaders had formed what might be described as the constitu-

*669 665 tional opposition to the Italians, accepting the ~~accomplished~~ fact of Italian rule, but continuing to demand the return of Albanian independence. For ideological reasons they inclined towards the Western Democracies, but their enthusiasm for the Allied cause was severely restrained, both by hatred of Communism and by fears that an Allied victory might once again deprive them of the Kossovo, as well as of their southern provinces. In taking up arms, therefore, against the Italians, their generous resolve to liberate Albania was perhaps seconded by their desire to win the political support of the Allies and to prove to their own people that they were no less patriotic than the Communists.

Thus, by the end of 1942, there were two distinct resistance movements, the Communist-directed L.N.C., which comprised, without combining, Abas Kupi's group, and the conservative Balli Kombetar. It is doubtful whether at this time their total effectives exceeded six thousand men; and their operations still caused their enemies little more than spasmodic annoyance. Nevertheless, they formed a rallying point for discontented elements of every kind; and the Italians justly feared that, in a country where the carrying of arms was so general, their activities might suddenly assume alarming proportions. In the spring of 1943, therefore, the Italian High Command decided to bring the strength of their army of occupation up to five and a half divisions; a proportion of one Italian soldier to every three Albanians of military age.

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*669 648 It was at this stage in the growth of the resistance movement that Maclean and Smiley had crossed the border into Albania. At first Partisans and Ballists had alike regarded them with undisguised suspicion; but each in turn soon recognised that a British Mission might bring them powerful moral and material support; and they began to compete with one another for the favour of the British officers.

Maclean found the Partisan forces predominantly composed of youths, and including a number of women's units. Poorly organised and ill-equipped, their morale was none the less remarkable; and there could be no doubt that they were actively, if not always effectively, fighting the Italians. After careful investigation, therefore, Maclean recommended that they should receive British support. Considerable quantities of arms, ammunition, and gold sovereigns were dropped to them by parachute; and with the help of these supplies a number of new bands were raised. Maclean and Smiley, moreover, personally undertook the training of two shock brigades of Partisans, which were later to form the backbone of the L.N.C. army.

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Both officers spent several weeks with the Central Council of the L.N.C. and came to know the leaders of the movement well. Mustafa Jinishi and Ymer Dyshnitsa seemed the most co-operative and agreeable; Enver Hoja, their leader, the best organiser, but more dogmatic and less friendly; Seifullah Maleshova, the cleverest, but of a sarcastic turn of mind and, so it seemed to the Englishmen, deeply imbued with the anti-British prejudices of the Comintern. A powerful but more sinister figure was Ali Dushanovitch, a Serb from the Kossovo, reputed to be Tito's delegate to the L.N.C. Ali seemed to exercise great influence over the Partisan leaders and would sometimes intervene most effectively in their discussions, striding up and down, biting his nails and delivering scathing criticisms of British policy in the Balkans. In the course of their journeys, Maclean and Smiley also met Muslim Peza and Baba Faya and, while admiring their personal qualities, soon discovered the extent of their political impotence.

In general, they found the leaders of the L.N.C. often slow to co-operate and always suspicious of British intentions. Indeed, every time Maclean gave support to the Balli Kombetar in their operations against the Italians he found himself accused by Enver Hoja of deliberately seeking to strengthen reactionary elements in Albania. Nor could he escape coming to the conclusion that the Communist leaders were more interested in eliminating their rivals and seizing political power after the war than in the immediate task of killing Italians. Despite

*649 these mutual suspicions, however, relations between them
648 remained cordial, and their differences of political opinion were often the subject of good-natured chaff. On one occasion Enver Hoja treated Smiley to a considerable speech, advocating a new world order on Communist lines. They were standing in front of a map of the world; and when Enver had finished he pointed to the map and said:

"And how would you like to see the world?"

"I'd also like to see it painted red all over," Smiley answered, adding after a pause: "but not the red you're thinking of!"

The forces of the Balli Kombetar seemed to Maclean and Smiley weaker in numbers, organisation, and morale than those of the L.N.C. Some indeed of their leaders paid more heed to British advice than did the Communists, but their zeal for war was severely restrained by the enjoyment of their present riches. While, therefore, the British officers gave them some supplies of arms and money, and occasionally took part in their operations against the enemy, the greater part of their efforts was devoted to the training and supplying of the Partisans.

In the seven months that their mission lasted the two British officers gave proof of tireless energy and travelled through almost every district of South and Central Albania. Wherever they went they stirred up unrest among the Albanians and provided the sinews of revolt in the shape of arms and of gold. They soon found, however, that they could not personally supervise the activities of all the different guerilla groups; and accordingly, at their request, new teams of British officers, wireless operators, and saboteurs were dropped to the principal centres of Albanian resistance.

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THE victories won by the Allies in the spring and summer of 1943 brought about a crisis in the affairs of Italy. Sicily was occupied by British and American armies; in Rome divided

counsels prevailed; and it seemed to many that Italy would sue 669*
for peace before the summer was out. The western regions of 648
the Balkans were mainly garrisoned by Italian armies; and it was therefore widely believed that an Allied invasion of Italy would be followed almost at once by landings on the east coast of the Adriatic, designed to receive, or if necessary to compel, the surrender of the Italian forces of occupation. Such speculation aroused hopes of early liberation among the Albanians; and men hastened to join the insurgent forces to take part in the final destruction of the enemy.

The prospect of an Italian collapse, however, brought the insurgent leaders up against the problem of who was to succeed to the government of Albania; and, believing that power would lie with the strongest guerilla forces, they sharpened their daggers for internal strife. The Partisans were convinced that the British and Americans would do all in their power to oppose the setting up of a Communist state in Albania, and they therefore determined to eliminate all possible rivals before an Allied landing could take place. They knew that the Albanian Fascists and collaborationists were too discredited to be a danger to them once the Italians had surrendered, and they therefore directed their energies against the Balli Kombetar, who were their natural class enemies. The Ballists, for their part, were not slow to take up the challenge; and relations between the two parties soon deteriorated to a point where armed clashes occurred.

Alarmed by the danger of civil war, Abas Kupi decided to 669*
intervene in the dispute. His aim was to restore the monarchy and preserve the interests of the Ghegs; and, wishing to prevent the preponderance alike of Communist or of Republican influence, he sought to include both parties in a United Front in which he and his friends might hold the balance of power. He therefore took the initiative in proposing to his colleagues on the Central Council of the L.N.C., and to the Ballist leaders, that they should come to terms. The Ballists accepted the suggestion at once, for they knew that it was favoured by the British and were besides aware of their own military weakness; but among the Communist leaders opinion was divided.

*669 Mustafa Jinishi and Ymer Dyshnitsa believed that the Albanian conservatives would stubbornly resist, and the British effectively prevent, any attempt to set up a Communist dictatorship. They therefore recommended that the L.N.C. should work with other parties and seek to extend their influence by constitutional means until the time was ripe — as in accordance with the laws of historical determinism it soon would be — for the movement to take power. Enver Hoja regarded this attitude as Menshevism and Right deviation, but he feared to oppose it openly, lest he should alienate Abas Kupi and split the L.N.C. before the Italians were beaten. He therefore made a show of yielding and authorised the appointment of a Partisan delegation, including Abas Kupi, Mustafa Jinishi, and Ymer Dyshnitsa, to negotiate with the delegates of the Balli Kombetar, headed by Midhat Frasheri.

Preliminary discussions were conducted through the intermediary of Ihsan Bey Toptani, an Albanian of distinguished family and independent political views; and at the end of July 1943, the delegates of both movements met together at Mukai, a mountain village three hours' march from Tirana. The orchard of a rich peasant was the scene of their conversations; and they were still deep in dispute and almost despairing of agreement when a courier came from the capital with the news of Mussolini's arrest. The whole spirit of the meeting changed; differences of opinion were swept aside; and in a moment of generous enthusiasm the delegates embraced one another and pledged themselves to work together against the Italians until Albania was free. Next day their agreement was embodied in a formal protocol and, after receiving their several signatures, was forwarded for ratification to the Ballist and Partisan headquarters.

The fall of the Duce was the signal for a general revolt against the Italians, a spontaneous movement of the whole population inspired by every passion from the loftiest patriotism to the basest greed for loot. The Albanians rallied in thousands to the guerilla bands; and their insurrection spread like wildfire, nourished by British supplies, stimulated by success, and lashed into frenzy by reprisals. The Italians were taken by

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surprise and their initial losses in men, and still more in material, were heavy. They recovered themselves, however, and seemed to be on the point of mastering the revolt by sheer terrorism when Marshal Badoglio proclaimed the armistice with the Allies. In the face of this new situation the Commander-in-Chief, General Dalmazzo, showed fatal indecision; for several days he hesitated between Mussolini and Badoglio; then, appalled by the rising tide of revolt, left for Belgrade to seek German support.

Meanwhile two divisions, obeying instructions from Badoglio, had marched over to the L.N.C. They were at first received as allies, but the greater part was soon disarmed by the guerillas and dispersed. The remaining three and a half divisions seemed utterly demoralised; some shut themselves up in the towns to await relief; others disintegrated, whole battalions at a time, before the onslaught of an insurgent rabble. By the end of September the guerillas had captured the equipment of some three divisions; and more than twenty thousand Italian soldiers were scattered throughout the countryside. The Albanians had suffered much at the hands of the Italians, and in the last weeks of fighting before the armistice the latter had adopted an ugly policy of reprisals. Nevertheless, when the Italians were at their mercy, the Albanians did not deign to take their revenge. Their former conquerors might beg their bread in pitiful distress but they did so unharmed. Some made their way back to the towns; others were taken into peasant homes and set to work upon the land; and, in the poorer districts, there were to be slave markets, where the Duce's legionaries were sold as beasts of burden for a gold napoleon a head.

Meanwhile the forces of revolt passed from strength to strength. The Partisans occupied Korcha, Gjinocastro, Berat, Elbasan, and Pogradets; the Red Flag flew from the municipal buildings; and Communist-controlled committees were set up to administer the towns and villages. The Partisans were supreme in the Tosk mountains, but large areas in the south, especially around Valona, declared for the Balli Kombetar. Among the Ghegs, Abas Kupi captured Burrel and Kruya, *669 after some of the stiffest fighting in the whole rising; Muharrem Bairaktar occupied Kukes, while Fikri Dine seized Dibra. The hold of the Italians was reduced to the ports of Valona and Durazzo, and the cities of Scutari and Tirana. There the Italian garrisons remained in control; but already their commanders were negotiating with members of the British Military Missions, and it seemed for a moment as if Albania might pass altogether out of the enemy's power. The Germans, however, were as quick to react in the Balkans as in Italy itself. A parachute division was flown to Tirana, and quickly dispersed the guerillas hanging on the fringes of the city. The Germans then marched against Abas Kupi, took Kruya by storm after a three-day battle, and threw the Agha and his men back into Mati. Another division was rushed into South Albania from Macedonia and methodically drove the Partisans out of the towns and back into the mountains. Within a fortnight the insurgents were everywhere on the defensive.

727 The Germans, however, were faced[1] with an acute shortage of manpower; and their High Command decided that no more than two and a half divisions could be spared for the pacification and garrisoning of Albania. They therefore deployed these forces so as to defend the coast from invasion across the Adriatic and to guard the principal towns and the roads on which they would depend for the maintenance of their communications. The rest of the country they determined to neutralise by policy rather than force. As a first step they arranged the release of most of the Albanian leaders whom the Italians had imprisoned for political reasons, and announced their intention of withdrawing from Albania as soon as the war was ended. They then encouraged the Albanians to reconstitute their state and persuaded Mehdi Frasheri, Lef Nosi, and Pater Anton Arapi to form a Council of Regency.

These three were men of honourable repute, representative of the chief religious communities and generally respected as elder statesmen who had played their part in the creation of an independent Albania a generation before. Under their aegis there was presently formed a government whose members were for the most part untainted by collaboration with the Italians. 727 On taking office they at once proclaimed Albania's neutrality in the World War, citing the example of Egypt as a precedent for the presence of belligerent forces on the soil of a neutral Power. They next repealed the Fascist constitution, allowed some measure of freedom of the Press and of association, and announced a general amnesty for all who had taken up arms against the Italians. This regime compared favourably with that of the Italians; and, since it was now clear that Albania would remain in the Axis zone, at least until the end of the winter, all but the boldest spirits took advantage of the amnesty. The new government, however, lacked the arms or the money to enforce its authority over the country; and the Germans wisely declined to make good the deficiency; for they already feared that the Albanians might one day turn against them. The writ of Tirana might run in the towns and the coastal plain where German troops were stationed; but the rest of Albania relapsed into its traditional state of anarchy; and in each district power was abandoned to the rival chiefs and guerilla leaders. Such a situation, accompanied as it was by continued supplies of comparatively cheap food from the Kossovo, was not displeasing to the Albanians; and German policy, seconded by the approach of winter, was presently rewarded by a general relaxation of the political tension and a decline in the activities of the guerillas.

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[1] [Following Italian capitulation in mid-1943--Analyst]

Now, when Enver Hoja saw that the Germans did not 669* intend to impose their rule beyond the towns and the main network of communications, he determined henceforward to devote the greater part of the energies of the L.N.C. to the liquidation of their political rivals. He accordingly refused to ratify the Mukai agreement and, in October 1943, issued a directive to all Partisan units to attack and destroy the forces of the Balli Kombetar wherever they might find them, even if it should mean suspending operations against the Germans. Civil war broke out; the superior discipline and equipment of the Partisans prevailed; and in a few weeks the Ballist forces were driven back into those areas where the presence of German troops prevented the further prosecution of the struggle. In

*669 the territories which they had thus brought under their control, the Partisans rewarded their supporters, punished their enemies, and laid down the rudiments of a Communist administration which soon began to organise the civilian population in support of the revolution. Meanwhile the Ballist leaders began, first surreptitiously and then more openly, to visit their friends in the Tirana Government and to seek their help to defend Albania [727] from Communism. The Germans were quick to seize this opportunity of diverting Albanian energies into internecine channels; they forgot the Ballist raids on their convoys; and accordingly made sufficient arms available through the Tirana Government to re-equip the Ballist bands and send them back into the mountains as counter-guerillas. The civil war in Southern Albania was thus indefinitely prolonged, to the exhaustion of the Albanians and the repose of the German army.

*669 665 By driving the Ballists into the arms of the Tirana Government, and so of the Germans, Enver Hoja succeeded in branding them as "collaborationists". At the same time, this deliberate political manœuvre revealed his social revolutionary intentions and alarmed Abas Kupi and the chief men among the Ghegs. Abas Kupi indeed had been the architect of the policy of alliance with the Balli Kombetar and, at Mukai, had entered into formal obligations towards them on behalf of the L.N.C. He therefore regarded Enver Hoja's change of front as a personal betrayal and came increasingly to suspect that his Communist colleagues meant to attack him, just as they had attacked the Ballists, unless he submitted to full Communist control. Accordingly, when his entreaties and rebukes had alike failed to persuade Enver Hoja to abandon the civil war, he determined to separate himself from a movement whose leaders he could not trust and already feared. He therefore set about consolidating his faction in Mati, Kruya, and Tirana, and took soundings among the leading Albanians who were known to favour a restoration of the monarchy. Then, in December 1943, at a congress held in the village of Herri in the mountains north of Tirana, he proclaimed the formation of the Zogist movement. True to his ideas of a United Front, he at once

offered an alliance to the L.N.C.; but they refused to recognise 669*
the Zogists;[1] and from this time his relations with Enver Hoja 665
steadily deteriorated. A clash was feared; but a few weeks later a German punitive expedition drove the main body of the Partisans back across the Shkumbi; and geographical separation imposed an uneasy truce on both sides.

Meanwhile Gani, Said, and Hassan Kryeziu had returned 669*
to the Jakova mountains. With the other prisoners at Ventotteno they had been transferred to a camp on the mainland in the summer of 1943, following rumours of an Allied descent on the island, and had escaped to Rome in the confusion that followed the announcement of the armistice. There they had found Mehmet Bey Konitza, an Albanian of distinction, whose advice the Germans had sought in deciding which Albanian internees might safely be allowed to return to their homes. Mehmet Bey was an old friend of the Kryeziu family and had surreptitiously entered their names upon his list, thus procuring for them the necessary travel permits. With these they had returned to Jakova and, after spending one night in their family home, had taken to the mountains with a bodyguard of a hundred men.

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By the autumn of 1943 the number of British Missions operating 669*
in Albania had become so considerable that it was decided to 648
recall Maclean to report and to send in a more senior officer, Brigadier Davies, to take command. Accordingly, in November, Maclean and Smiley were evacuated by Motor Torpedo-Boat from the neighbourhood of Valona,[2] and, after preparing in Cairo the first detailed report to be received on the Albanian situation, were sent to London to acquaint the Foreign Secretary and other interested parties with their experiences and opinions.

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[1] Also known as the "Legality" movement, after the name which Zog had given to his party in the revolution of 1924.

[2] By a curious coincidence the boat which evacuated Maclean and Smiley 000
brought in my former colleague, Sandy Glen, who was to spend some weeks reconnoitring the South Albanian coast for the Admiralty.

Maclean and Smiley were naturally given to improvisation and had always travelled light. Brigadier Davies, however, felt the need of a more numerous staff, and, in accordance with accepted military standards of establishment, set up a headquarters composed of a full complement of staff officers G. and Q. This impressive but unwieldy organisation was served by a chief clerk and a signals officer commanding several wireless operators, and was furnished with the latest collapsible camp furniture, as well as several hundredweight of stationery. Its defence, however, was entrusted to unreliable tribal levies; and its mobility was doubtfully assured by a baggage-train of more than a hundred mules, hard to feed and impossible to hide. Maclean's more instinctive methods of work were now replaced by regular military schedules. Orders were given for the whole mission to stand to at sunrise and at sunset. As a precautionary measure action stations were assumed whenever a shot was heard — an unfortunate decision in view of the Albanian propensity for *feu de joie*; and the guerillas were astonished or amused by the precise but incomprehensible evolutions of their allies. Altogether it was magnificent but, to paraphrase Marshal Bosquet, it was not guerilla war.

The Brigadier had been in Albania little more than a month and was still feeling his way among its complex and unfamiliar problems when winter fastened on the mountains — the harshest winter of the war. Short of food and almost destitute of boots and warm clothing, the Central Council of the L.N.C. were hard put to it to keep their forces in being at all. Then, to make matters worse, the Germans began a series of determined punitive operations, designed to destroy the guerilla movement altogether. The leaders of the L.N.C. were in many ways inefficient from a military point of view. Their endurance, however, was boundless; and, relying on their superior mobility, made possible by living off the country and on short rations, they were prepared to take what often seemed to the British officers to be quite unnecessary risks. Brigadier Davies was an older man than Enver Hoja; and his staff was both bigger and more accustomed to heavy baggage and sustaining food than were the Communist leaders. He had meant

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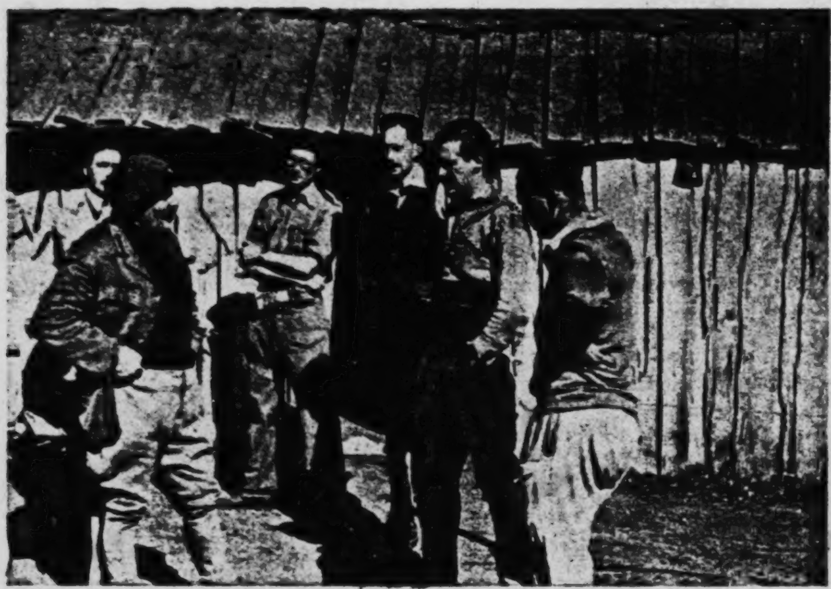

BRIGADIER DAVIES AND HIS STAFF, AUTUMN 1943
(*Left to Right*) Smythe, Davies, Hare, Nicholls, Maclean, Smiley

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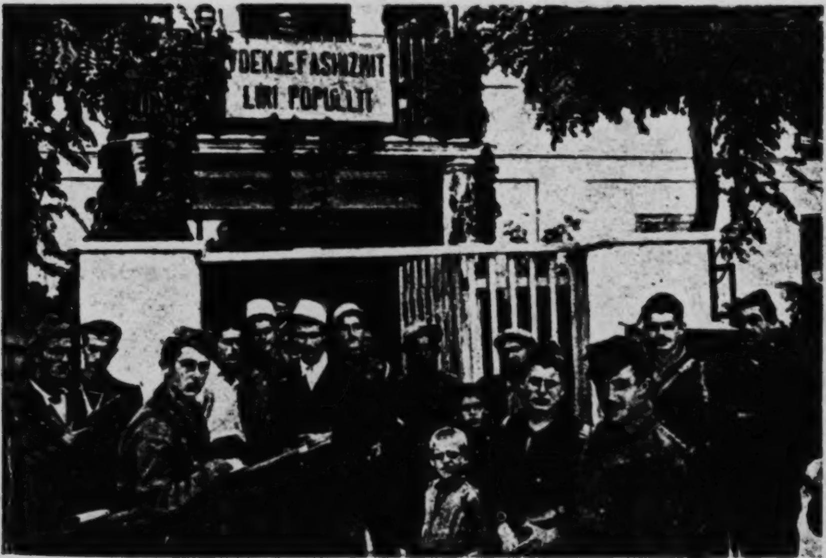
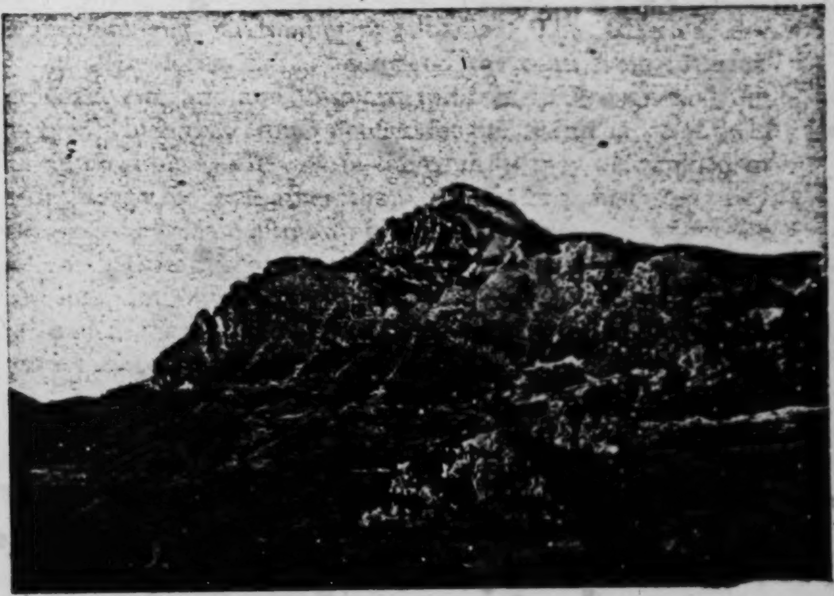

VDEKJE FASHIZMIT
LIRI POPULLIT

PARTISANS IN LIBERATED POGRADETZ, OCTOBER 1943
The Partisans slogan " Death to Fascism ; Liberty to the People "
is inscribed over the door

[-68a-]

THE PLATEAU AT BIZA, WHERE WE LANDED 1

1 [cf. cat. 116, pp. 78-82 for details--Analyst]



ON THE WAY TO SHENGVERG 2

[-68b-] 2 [cf. cat. 116, pp. 82-83, for description.--Analy

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at first to remain permanently with the Central Council, but already in the autumn he had found it difficult to keep pace with their forced marches. He decided, therefore, to limit his contact with them to messengers and occasional meetings and began to move southwards, planning to return to Italy to make a personal report on the Albanian situation. Then came the snow. The Brigadier's boots gave way at the end of a long march: they could not be replaced. His Chief-of-Staff, Colonel Nicholls, contracted frostbite in his feet and for ten days dared not take off his boots in case he could not get them on again. Meanwhile the German trap was closing round them; their baggage-train was ambushed; and their mules, wireless sets, and stores were captured. Food became desperately short; the Partisan forces disintegrated; and the Brigadier now lost touch altogether both with the Central Council and with his own sub-missions.

He planned to break through to a safer district to the south, but blizzard conditions impeded the march, and, on the 7th of January, the Mission took refuge in a sheepfold above the little village of Kostengje. There, next morning, they were ambushed by a band of Albanian quislings. The enemy surrounded them on three sides, and, keeping just out of range of the British submachine-guns, poured a steady rifle fire into the wattle structure where they sheltered. To have stayed there would have been certain death; the only hope of escape lay in climbing some hundreds of feet up a steep and bare snow slope behind the sheepfold. The attempt was made; the Brigadier was hit three times, twice in the stomach; and two other members of the party were wounded with him. These three were captured and brought back to Tirana, where they were handed over to the Germans. Nicholls reached the crest of the ridge with the survivors; among them Alan Hare, the Brigadier's ablest staff officer, who had refused to leave his wounded chief until ordered to escape. After a sixteen hours' march they shook off their pursuers and a few days later decided to disperse; Hare to the south to resume wireless contact with Headquarters and Nicholls to the north in search of help. Hare could still walk, though already very lame from frostbite; but when

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Nicholls tried to go on he found that he could no longer stand. Gangrene had set in in both his feet; and for several days he had to be dragged over the rough mountain paths, sitting on his overcoat. At length he was found a mule, but he was already too weak to ride unsupported and fell, dislocating his shoulder. Few men can have suffered more, but Nicholls refused to give in. Three weeks after the ambush he was at last rescued by Seymour, a survivor from one of the British sub-missions to the north, who brought him to the house of Ihsan Bey Toptani, near to Tirana. Ihsan sent for a doctor; an amputation was attempted; but it was too late. The limit of endurance had been passed and a few hours later Nicholls[1] was dead.

The remaining officers and men of the Headquarters and of the various sub-missions in North and Central Albania wandered for several weeks in the high mountains. Some were captured by the enemy, others were attacked by robbers for their gold and weapons, and yet others marched on through the snow in search of food and shelter. But the capture of the Brigadier had brought about a sharp fall in British prestige; and the mountaineers, fearful of German reprisals, turned hostile and barred their doors against the fugitives. In the end most of the survivors found their way to Abas Kupi's territory, where they were given hospitality and protection. There they were reorganised by Hare and Seymour, who were presently able to renew wireless communications with Cairo and to send out a report of the winter's disaster.

Meanwhile the main body of the L.N.C. had made their way back into South Albania by forced marches, twice narrowly escaping encirclement and annihilation. They regrouped in the mountains near Berat, and, thanks to British support, eventually recovered from their defeats. Abas Kupi for his part bowed before the storm and disbanded most of his forces to their homes, maintaining only a bodyguard of some two hundred men. He now devoted himself to organising a firm basis for his movement in Central Albania and to extending its influence to the principal towns and among the chiefs of the North. Meanwhile he suspended operations against the

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[1] Nicholls was posthumously awarded the George Cross.

Germans, waiting for campaigning weather to come again and for the clouds to lift from the political situation.

To the observers in London and Cairo, intently watching the movements of the tiny flags on their staff maps, it seemed as if the backbone of the Albanian revolt had been broken. The forces of the L.N.C. were said to be reduced to seven thousand men and these were confined to the mountains of the South; in Central Albania the Zogist forces were virtually disbanded; and few believed that Gani Kryeziu would again raise an effective force. Yet the need for some reorganisation was urgent; for, with the summer, the Germans were expected to begin their withdrawal from the Balkans; and the High Command had counted on the guerillas to harass their retreat through Albania. Moreover, Albania possessed a Mediterranean coast-line; and His Majesty's Government could not be altogether indifferent to the country's political future. Following, therefore, on Maclean's report to the interested authorities in London, it was decided to work for a reconciliation between the Zogists and the L.N.C. and to encourage them to united action against the Germans. This was believed to be the course best calculated to inflict the maximum losses on the German army in its retreat, and most likely, by the broadening of the resistance movement which it would imply, to lead to the eventual establishment of a truly representative Albanian Government. To give effect to these decisions Maclean was invited to go back to Albania, this time to Abas Kupi's area.

III

RECONNAISSANCE

He passed bleak Pindus, Acherusia's lake,
And left the primal city of the land,
And onwards did his further journey take
To greet Albania's Chief, whose dread command
Is lawless law; for with a bloody hand
He sways a nation, turbulent and bold:
Yet here and there some daring mountain-band
Disdain his power, and from their rocky hold
Hurl their defiance far, nor yield, unless to gold.

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (Canto II, verse 47)

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I RETURNED to Cairo early in February 1944 from a journey in Saudi Arabia to find among my correspondence a small, but thick envelope, heavily sealed. After breaking the seals and opening three inner envelopes marked respectively " Personal ", " Secret ", and " for Amery only ", I came to the following text: " Please call at my office as soon as you are back ".

The signature was that of Philip Leake, the new chief of the Albanian section at Headquarters.

I was at some loss to understand why so anodyne a message should have occasioned such expenditure of stationery, but duly repaired to the imposing and somewhat prominent block of buildings where the " D " Organisation was now installed. The perennial reorganisation of the Secret Services, rather than any considerations of security, involved frequent changes in the office accommodation of their personnel. As a result, few officers knew where their colleagues were working, while the Cypriot porter who was supposed to guide visitors to their destinations had long given up trying to find out. I now brushed past this worthless individual, as he quietly contemplated the throng of questing staff officers and agents, and made my way to the room which Leake had occupied a few weeks earlier. There I found a conference of Arabists in progress and was obligingly misdirected by one of them to a basement where a group of naval officers were planning a descent on the Dodecanese Islands. At length, after many wanderings, I located the Albanian section in a semi-detached outhouse, or garage, and was eventually admitted into Leake's presence by a blonde and incredulous secretary who kept assuring me that the Persian bureau had moved elsewhere. Leake greeted me rather tensely and, motioning me to a chair, said without further ado:

"Our set-up in North Albania has been badly knocked about by Davies' capture. There are only two chaps now at the Mission Headquarters and one of them has got bad frostbite. The other, between ourselves, seems a bit queer to judge from his telegrams, but that's hardly surprising seeing what they've been through. We wondered if you would care to join them."

He paused a moment as if to savour the full horror of his invitation and then added, almost as an afterthought:

"You know it isn't my idea, but Bill Maclean is going in again — this time to reorganise the North — and he's asked for you as a sort of political officer. Smiley is going too."

I had known Bill Maclean since school days; and, in the previous November, when he had emerged from his first mission to Albania, we had spent several hours together, discussing the report he was to make in London. Then I had been waiting for orders to join the headquarters of the Greek guerillas, a plan which had since been cancelled, for reasons not unconnected with the Cairo Conference. Now I was unemployed and accepted Leake's offer at once, glad to think that I might share in the liberation of the Balkans with the same Albanians whom I had first known in the dark days of 1940. Besides, there could be no better companions for such a tiger shoot than Maclean and Smiley.

The romance of modern adventures is somewhat diminished by the disagreeable routines which usually precede them. For

000 several days I submitted to a series of blood tests, inoculations, and medical examinations, culminating in an interview with a psychiatrist. This gentleman asked me to arrange a number of wooden cubes in a required geometric pattern and then pronounced me " fit for duties involving mental strain ", though without disclosing the mysterious process of reasoning by which he had come to this conclusion. Then, since there was no other way of reaching Abas Kupi's territory, I was sent to train as a parachutist on and above the plain of Esdraelon, which has been held by some, and it then seemed to me appropriately, to be the site of Armageddon.

Parachuting is neither difficult nor very dangerous, indeed official statistics show no more than one fatal accident in ten thousand jumps and one limb injury in six hundred. Yet it is undeniably contrary to the most basic and tenacious human instincts. The would-be parachutist is taught from the start of his training that the natural reactions of falling man are the chief cause of broken bones. He is therefore required to learn an elaborate and highly artificial technique of rolling and tumbling which discovers irksome and unexpected muscles but enables him to defy the laws of gravity without discomfort and, in time, with confidence. Accordingly I rolled and tumbled for three days, and rose at dawn on the fourth morning stiff and muscle-bound by the so-called " limbering up " exercises. Too late to partake of breakfast, I clambered into a lorry with ten other trainees, and we drove out from our camp to the aerodrome for our first jump.

Later I was to treat parachutes without much respect, but that morning it seemed a matter of life and death that every strap should fit exactly. My confidence that the parachute would open was of the intellect only; and I felt that everyone who bumped into me was reducing my already slender chances of survival. Before emplaning each of us was allotted a number, thus discarding our personal identities. Then, laughing nervously, we clambered into the belly of the bomber and, as the roar of the engines drowned our conversations, were left each to his own thoughts and the contemplation of the tense features of his fellows. The engines sang furiously as we gained height, and when we came over the dropping-ground 000 a circular trap door was opened in the floor of the 'plane. Through this numbers one and two disappeared with a sickening metallic crack as the automatic rip-cord of their parachutes whipped back against the bomber's underside. I was number three and it was now my turn. I sat facing the tail with my legs dangling through the hole and watched the ground race by beneath them but without any sensation of giddiness. With an effort I looked up and surrendered my powers of decision to the instructor. The bulb above my head flashed red in warning, then green, the signal to jump. The instructor brought down his hand like the starter in a race and I gently eased myself away from the edge of the hole. I passed through it and was caught at once in the slipstream of the 'plane and almost shaken apart; for a moment I was distinctly conscious of falling through space; then the 'chute opened and suddenly all was still. An extraordinary and elating sense of freedom came over me, and with it a mood of almost divine detachment from time and space. I felt myself drifting very slowly and looking about me gazed on the snow-covered summit of Mount Hermon and to the west on the sunlit blue of the sea. Then with a wrench I tore myself away from the sheer enjoyment of the descent and forced myself to concentrate on damping the oscillation of the parachute and bringing my feet together for the landing. I was only just in time; for suddenly the ground came up and hit me. I rolled over and standing up was earthbound and awkward in my harness: like Baudelaire's albatross, whose "*ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher*".

Maclean and Smiley were not yet back from London by the time my parachute course came to an end. I therefore returned to Cairo, to the hospitality of my friend Donald Mallet's flat, and passed much of the time discussing the "tangled knot of human fate" with the wise men of Egypt. I spent a happy afternoon in the Bektashi monastery, cut into the face of the Mukattam cliffs above Cairo's citadel. The sect was strong among the Albanians and many of the monks I met there were Tosks. I walked with them through their terraced

000 gardens and along the cliff paths overhung with bougainvillia; and listened while they talked of their love for animals, their belief in the virtues of wine and music, and many other things expressive of their broad tolerance and humanism. Before I left them the Abbot gave me a stone from the martyr Hussein's tomb and a *tesbé* of olive wood; amulets from which I was never separated for the next eight months. Friends also took away my pistol; and when they brought it back there were engraved upon its butt two texts taken from the pre-Islamic poets. On the one side was written:

> But when you shoot it is not You but God who aims,

and on the other:

> For the ways are many but death is one:
> wherefore then should you be afraid?

Maclean and Smiley reached Cairo at the beginning of April; and we spent several days together, gleaning the latest information from Albania, studying the German military dispositions in the Balkans, and selecting the weapons, equipment, and clothes which we should need on our expedition. From Cairo we flew to Bari in Apulia, and there were lodged in the Albergo Imperiale — a great barrack of a hotel — which had been commandeered by the army, and at night presented a spectacle of drunken and licentious soldiery such as I had not seen since the days of the Spanish Civil War. On our first evening, indeed, I was sharply reminded of those days; for in the hotel we found Peter Kemp, a born soldier of fortune, and a veteran of the Spanish Foreign Legion.

Kemp had landed in Italy only a few days before, at the end of a ten months' journey through the whole length of Albania from the Greek frontier to Berane in Montenegro. Twice he had been surrounded by the Germans; once near Dibra, where he had shot his way out to the safety of the mountains, and a second time in the Jakova region, whence he escaped disguised as a woman. The most interesting feature, however, of his mission was the personal reconnaissance which he had made of the Kossovo — the first to be undertaken by a

7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

British officer since the German-invasion. Kemp's presence in 000 that disputed region had given rise to violent protests from the Yugoslav Partisans, who had insisted on his recall. He brought us, however, most welcome news, for he had personally spoken with Gani and Said Kryeziu in their hide-out in the mountains, and reported that their morale was high and their will to fight unimpaired, in spite of illness and long months of imprisonment.

In quest of further information on Albania we[1] sought out 643 Ekrem Bey Libohovo, who had been King Zog's Minister of Court but had deserted him to become one of the chief instruments of the Italian regime. Ekrem Bey had been Prime Minister of Albania at the time of Mussolini's fall and, judging that the moment had come to change sides once more, flew over to Rome on the eve of the armistice and chose to remain in the Allied zone. We drove over to see him at Lecce, where he was virtually interned, and learnt from him many interesting details of the past history of some of the leading Albanians and of the relationships between them. Such information, though of little value alone, was well worth acquiring; for it is only by the continual comparison of opinions and anecdotes that it becomes possible to assess the accuracy of political reports. On this occasion a curious incident enlivened our conversation. Ekrem Bey was relating the circumstances of the Italian invasion of Albania and spoke of his conduct at the time as he must so often have done to Italian visitors during the Fascist regime:

"As you know," he said, "when the Italians landed, the King left the country, and with him I went to Greece. . . . I went to Greece. . . . I went to Greece. . . ." He repeated himself like a broken record, suddenly at a loss to know how to extricate himself from the embarrassing story on which he had embarked: the truth was that, within forty-eight hours of arriving in Greece, he had returned to Tirana and become Italy's Quisling in Albania. At last he gave it up and with a wan smile and self-deprecating gesture said:

"I really must see what has happened to the coffee."

Verily the way of the transgressor is hard.

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[1] [British Intelligence Agents, in April 1944-- Analyst]

000 On the way back to Bari we stopped near Brindisi to call on Count Carlo Frasso, who was held to be an Italian expert on Albania. Count Carlo was reputed a friend of the British, but as *Co-Belligerency* was still in its infancy, we had been instructed to present ourselves to him under false names. This was to be the cause of some merriment, for the Duke of Spoleto — once uncrowned king of Croatia — was staying with the Count, and at dinner, as is sometimes the way of royalty, bombarded us with questions about our families. This called for flights of fancy on our part appropriate to our fictitious names; and to each other's great amusement we spent much of the meal telling the Duke of the eccentricities of our imaginary relatives. Apart, however, from this diversion and our enjoyment of the Count's excellent hospitality, we also learnt something of the personality and influence of Nureddin Bey Vlora, a nephew of Ismail Kemal. Our host knew him well and described him as: "too great a patriot to accept foreign domination, but too great a gentleman to work with the Communists".

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Bari was the operational base on which the British liaison officers with the Balkan guerilla movements depended for their supplies and day-to-day instructions. Accordingly, when all other preparations were completed, we attended a conference at the Headquarters of the "D" Organisation where the charter of our mission and our exact terms of reference were discussed. Our final instructions as then agreed were:

1. To reorganise and co-ordinate the activities of the British missions in Gheg Albania:
2. To raise the Ghegs in general, and the Zogist forces of Abas Kupi in particular, against the Germans:
3. To attempt to bring about co-operation between the Zogist movement and the L.N.C.

We were to be responsible to the H.Q. Balkan Air Force, under the command of Air-Marshal Elliot, and through him to General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson,[1] the Supreme Allied

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[1] Now Field-Marshal Lord Wilson.

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Commander in the Mediterranean theatre of operations. Political matters were to be referred to the Foreign Office, through the diplomatic staff of the Resident Minister of State, Mr. Harold Macmillan; but Maclean was authorised to communicate direct with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in cases of overriding importance and urgency. Details of policy were to await our estimate of the situation. We were, however, authorised to promise arms to all who would fight the Germans, though we were given to understand that no supplies would be sent to any guerilla leader until he had first taken the field.

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Once we had received our final instructions there was no more to be done until the experts in wind and weather should appoint a day for our departure. They wasted no time; and on 17th April, the anniversary of Maclean's first landing in Albania, we drove out along the road that follows the flat and dreary Apulian shore to Brindisi, where an aeroplane was waiting. We spent the morning supervising the packing of our gear into steel containers specially designed for parachuting, and watched them being loaded on to the 'plane. For the rest of the day we sought to kill time and subdue our own nervous impatience speculating on the problems that lay ahead of us, reading papers, playing cards, or walking the cold and windy streets of Brindisi.

Towards evening we drove out to the aerodrome, and, after taking leave of the staff officers who had accompanied us thus far, took off half an hour before sunset. The 'plane was a U.S. Dakota and through the big door in its flank, left open for our jump, we watched the Italian coast recede while sea and sky melted into one another as the darkness drew on. Our pilot had to locate two dropping-grounds: the first destined to receive our gear but judged too rocky for our own descent, the second where we were to jump ourselves. The flight across the Adriatic lasted perhaps three-quarters of an hour; and it was barely night when we made out the signal fires of the first of our targets. Here the American despatcher, assisted by Peter Kemp, who had come to see us off — " somewhat literally ", as Smiley remarked — heaved the containers out into space. In

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twenty minutes all our precious gear was scattered over the mountains of Albania, to the profit, as we later learned, of the rapacious mountaineers. Our pilot then altered course in the direction of the second target; for nearly two hours we circled over the appointed area, but no trace of the signal fires was to be seen. At length the drone of our engines seemed to awake the enemy; and, just north of Tirana, we ran into flak. The pilot therefore decided to give up the search, and at one o'clock in the morning we were back in Brindisi.

Two days later, on the 19th April, we determined to make another attempt, but drove over to Lecce in the morning to escape from the gloom of Brindisi. There, in a small black-market restaurant, we partook of a truly sybaritic meal, and afterwards wandered through the streets of the glorious baroque city, forgetting the sterner duties which lay ahead of us in the enjoyment of its gorgeous dwellings and worldly churches.

We were late in returning to Brindisi and it was already night when we took off. The aeroplane seemed cold and noisy; and I felt irritated and awkward, trussed in my parachute. I was tired, however, and at some stage must have fallen asleep, for it was past midnight when the despatcher woke me up to say that we were over the target. We each took a gulp of *grappa* — the fiery Italian grape spirit — and formed up by the open door for the jump. Through it I could see the signal fires, set out in the form of a cross at the bottom of a snow-rimmed trough in the mountains. The surrounding ranges made the approach to the target difficult; and we knew that the pilot had overshot his mark when the bulb by the door flashed green — the signal to jump. I went out last, shrinking inwardly from the plunge, and was caught up in the slipstream of the 'plane and violently shaken. Then the parachute opened; the smell and vibration of the aeroplane ceased; the tension went from me; and I felt suddenly warm. We must have jumped from near three thousand feet, for my arms soon grew tired of straining at the guiding ropes of the parachute to check its oscillation. I could see the mountains rising past me as I drifted down, but the ground was still hidden in the night.

For a moment I was aware of something white, then without the slightest jar I found myself sprawling on my face in a deep patch of snow. Luck was with me for I had fallen in a forest and might well have been impaled on a jagged pine. Maclean had come down perhaps a mile away, also unhurt; but Smiley, landing less than a hundred yards from me, bruised his back badly against a tree. Nor was this our only near escape; for, as we saw next morning, Maclean and I had by some accident been issued with cotton parachutes. These were of a type designed for dropping stores and, unlike those made of silk for human use, frequently failed to open. 000

We were about half way up the side of the mountain trough and presently saw torches moving towards us through the trees below. In the distance wolves were howling; and for a moment I speculated idly on which would reach us first. The torches seemed a long time in coming and we guided them with our own electric flash-lamps. When they drew near, however, we rested these on suitable mounds and retired some twenty yards from them so as not to present a target should the torch-bearers prove unfriendly. The precaution was wise, for such accidents had happened before; but we had fallen among friends; and the torch-bearers turned out to be a Zogist cheta, sent to meet us by George Seymour and Alan Hare. There were a dozen of them, still shadowy figures in the night, save for their leader, Bairam, a Tosk with a mighty moustache, who spoke some Italian.

Bairam greeted us courteously, but without emotion, and guided us downhill through the trackless forest for an hour or so until we came to a half-open sheepfold on the mountainside. There we sat round an open log fire and were presently refreshed with hot tea. Then, seeing it was late, I lay down to sleep, warming one side of my body by the fire while the mountain wind chilled the other. All around the guerillas sat cross-legged, bristling with bandoliers, pistols, and hand-grenades, their unshaven faces sinister in the firelight. They showed no sign of sleeping and now and again spoke to one another in a whisper. For some time I watched them through the flames and smoke, seeking to measure the span, intangible and yet experienced, which separated this brigand encampment

000 from the baroque splendours of Lecce and the bourgeois pleasures of its black-market restaurant.

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We rose at daybreak and emerged from the sheepfold to find ourselves on the edge of a broad grassland plateau set in an amphitheatre of rock peaks. This was broken only towards the east, where a wooded gorge led down towards the village of Shengyerg. The scene was impressive but desolate; for, although the thaw was far advanced, there was at this height but little sign of spring. Moreover, such snow as still remained, mostly on the higher slopes and in ravines seldom reached by the sun, was everywhere thickly powdered with grey dust. This phenomenon was widely observed that year in the Western Balkans and was attributed by scientists to a recent eruption of Vesuvius, four hundred miles away.

We breakfasted off hard-boiled eggs and presently set out towards the valley with an escort of a dozen of the guerillas. We went slowly, for we were not yet in training, and, after some four hours' walk across the plateau and down the gorge
[361] leading from it, came out on to a ridge overlooking Shengyerg. There we halted and through our glasses studied the white houses scattered over the hillside, each at least half a mile from
[795] its neighbour. Among them, distinguishable from the others only by its squat minaret, stood a mosque; for despite its name, which in Albanian means Saint George, Shengyerg was a Moslem village. We could detect no sign of anything untoward and so made our way quite openly down to the house which belonged to Seymour's interpreter, a schoolmaster named Shaqir. There we stopped for a midday rest and, after restoring our carbohydrates with a bottle of cherry brandy — a most welcome gift which the British Mission had sent us in greeting — attacked the lavish if starchy fare which our host presently set before us.

*669 Shengyerg was a place of some strategic importance for it was the terminus of a motor road, at this time[1] still blocked by

[1] [late April 1944 -- Analyst]

snow. It was also remarkable as one of the very few Gheg villages where Partisan influence had to some extent survived the disasters of the winter. There was a continual struggle for power between the Zogist and the Partisan families in the village, but our hosts, who were Zogists, seemed confident that they could maintain the ascendant. Nor, on the surface at least, were their personal relations with their political opponents unduly strained; and when we had eaten they gave a most friendly welcome to a group of Partisans, led by Frederick Nosi, who already knew Maclean and Smiley and had come to greet them on their return.

Frederick Nosi was a nephew of the "collaborationist" Regent, Lef Nosi, but was none the less already prominent among the younger Partisan leaders. He spoke English fluently, having studied at the American college, and in the previous year had served as interpreter to Maclean and later to Brigadier Davies. He had now been sent to Shengyerg by the Central Council to try and make sure of the support of Ali Stepani, the old *Bairaktar* of the district, in preparation for the northern drive which Enver Hoja planned to make that summer. Frederick had already won over Ali's eighteen-year-old son, Rames; and the boy proudly showed us Enver Hoja's signature engraved upon the butt of his pistol. The *Bairaktar*, however, had lived through many revolutions and was still waiting to see which faction would prevail before finally taking sides. With Frederick came half a dozen young Partisans, all under twenty, but better equipped and smarter in appearance than our own rather ragged Zogist bodyguard. There was no mistaking their keenness, nor their faith that in their new-found and still undigested doctrine they held the solution to all the problems of the world.

Frederick gave Maclean news of his friends among the Partisan leaders and told us of the defeats of the winter and the progress of their reorganisation. He answered guardedly when we spoke of Abas Kupi, and though his bearing towards his monarchist hosts was courteous, he left us in no doubt that the rift between Zogists and Partisans was far deeper than our Headquarters had believed.

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When our visitors were gone we ate a light evening meal and soon after dark set out for Derye, the village where Seymour and Hare had made their base. Bairam, who was in charge of our bodyguard, had somehow procured ponies for us to ride, but the journey was nevertheless a nightmare. It rained hard; and the night was black as pitch. Boulders and branches seemed to rush at me from the darkness, crushing my leg against the saddle or dragging me almost bodily out of it. The paths were stony, steep, and precipitous; blocked by snowdrifts on the heights, and in the valleys washed away by the thaw. A slip would often have meant a fall of fifty or a hundred feet; and I lacked confidence in the mountain ponies which, though better natured, were not as nimble or sure-footed as mules. Besides I had grown soft in a long sojourn by the fleshpots of Egypt; and my muscles were racked by the angular wooden saddle on which I rode. On mountain paths the measurements of space have but little meaning; and the Ghegs therefore calculate distance in terms of time. On this occasion our guides had assured us that the journey would only take four hours; but, as was often the way, their reckoning proved to be devised for our encouragement rather than for our exact instruction. We had indeed already marched nine hours when, shortly after daybreak, we crossed the ridge above Derye.

The house which sheltered the British Mission lay in a valley half a mile or so from the main road and was surrounded by a large and straggling orchard. We sent a messenger ahead to announce our arrival; the door was opened before we had even knocked; and a peasant conducted us through a cow-shed to the room where Seymour and Hare worked and slept. Seymour was already up, wrapped in a white duffle coat and wearing a white Albanian fez, adorned with his regimental badge. He seemed enormous in the half light; and a reddish moustache, curving upwards like that of "Kaiser Bill", betrayed his impulsive and cheerfully arrogant temper. Hare was still in bed, for it was early; and besides he was only beginning to recover from the effects of frostbite. We were old friends; and I had known that he would be in Derye. And yet it seemed astonishing in those primitive surroundings to

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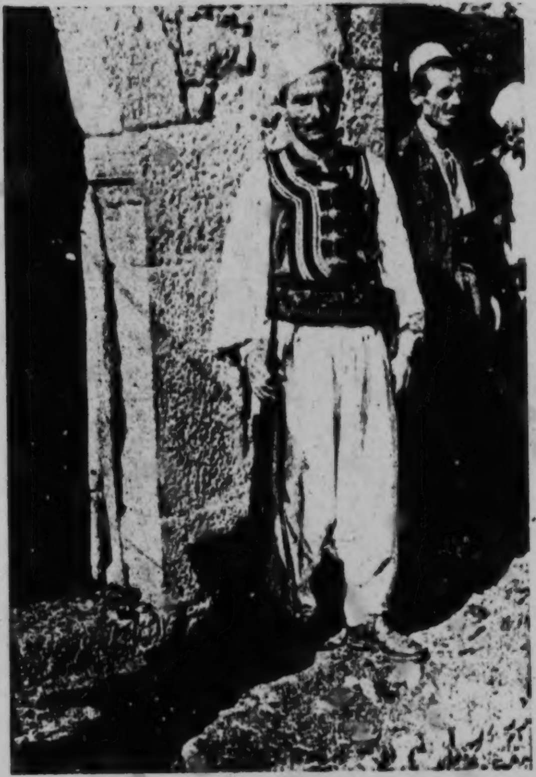
ZOGIST GUERILLAS AT ZIBER

REPRISALS

A house burnt by the Italians during a punitive expedition through Mati, September 1943

[-84a-]



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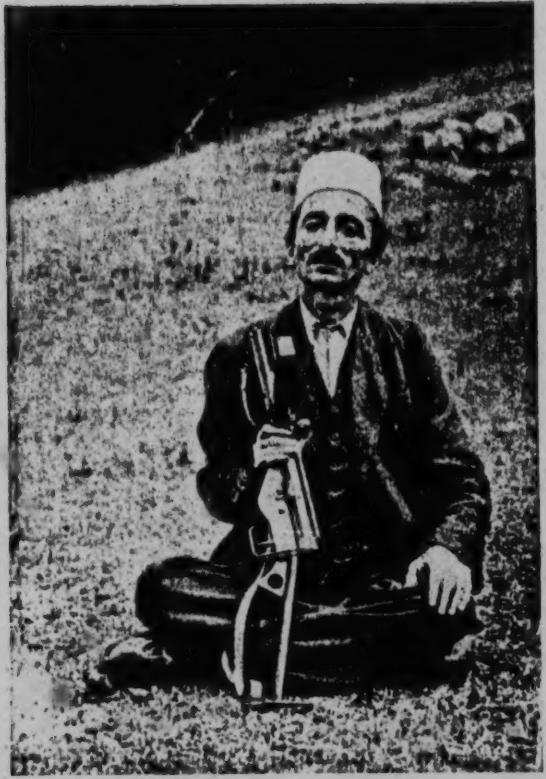

DULE BEY ALLEMANI

OOO hear his familiar voice, inseparably associated in my mind with undergraduate dinners, visits to Nuits St. Georges, and political discussions in London night clubs. They plied us with food and drink; and when we had taken the edge off each other's curiosity Seymour led us to an upper room. There mattresses had been spread; and we slept off our journey until near midday.

We spent three days in Derye, picking up the threads of the Albanian situation from Seymour and Hare. Our quarters were cramped but warm; and our discussions were accompanied by a lavish hospitality such as I had never hoped to find in these wild regions. There was evidently no shortage of eggs or meat in Derye; and a varied array of bottles was convincing proof of the efficiency of the Mission's courier service with German-occupied Tirana.

By profession a regular officer and by instinct a country gentleman, Seymour had reverted to type in the enforced inactivity of the winter months. He showed us over the house, expatiated on the faults of his Italian cook and the merits of his cellar, and related the annals of the village almost as if he had been the squire of Derye. He had taken strong likes and dislikes to the different guerilla leaders; but for all that discussed their problems with the same rough impartiality with which he might have spoken of disputes between tenants at home. He judged each case on its merits rather than in relation to any overriding military or political design; but, despite his apparent insular prejudices, his instinct was often sound. He was besides, like many British representatives in strange lands, less impatient of the shortcomings of the " natives " than of the errors of Headquarters, from whom he rightly demanded, and perhaps naïvely expected, the highest standards of efficiency.

Hare was of cooler temper and gifted with a rare faculty of subjecting his own experiences, as well as the situations of others, to dispassionate analysis. His approach to problems was essentially intellectual and therefore easily communicated; and we learnt much from him of the social and economic structure of Central Albania, as well as of the psychology of the Ghegs. Frostbite had kept him tied to one place for several

000 weeks, so that his appreciation of events was necessarily tentative. He saw little hope, however, of reconciling Zogists and Partisans, and believed that our Headquarters gravely underrated the difficulties of bringing Abas Kupi back into the fight. Hare's state of health, as well as his length of service in Albania, would fully have entitled him to seek evacuation; and indeed we had been ordered to relieve both him and Seymour. We judged, however, that his support would be a great strength to us and easily prevailed on him to remain. Seymour also volunteered to stay to help ensure continuity of policy.

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[622] THE evening after we had reached Derye we received the visit of Kiamil, the headman of the village, who had protected and provided for the British Mission during the anxious winter months. Kiamil was an Albanian of the old school, dressed in a handsome, dark-blue cloak and remarkable by the extraordinary whiteness of his hands. He was indeed afflicted with a curious complex, whereby he felt impelled to wash his hands and mouth every hour of the day, a proceeding which excited the wonder of the villagers, though without in any degree inducing their emulation. He spoke Turkish, Arabic, and a little French, having studied at Salonika; and was eager for news of the Near East where he had travelled as a young man. A pious Moslem he would touch no alcohol, and in any case refused to take food or drink outside his own house. He greeted us with the old-fashioned salaam, discussed general topics for half an hour, and then delivered a message from Abas Kupi to say that he had learned of our arrival, and was on his way to meet us.

*669 648 Abas Kupi duly reached Derye on the following evening[1] with a force of about a hundred men. He put off meeting us that night, pleading fatigue from the march, but came next morning to the house where we were lodged, accompanied by a few armed bodyguards. He was dressed now in riding-

[1] [late April, 1944 -- Analyst]

breeches and a grey " redingote " which heightened his likeness 669+
to Napoleon; but he looked older and leaner than when I had 648
seen him in Belgrade. We sat cross-legged round the hearth 186
in the upper room; and when the exchange of formal greetings was done Maclean spoke of the aims of our Mission. He explained that we had been charged to help the Ghegs in their war against the Germans and to co-ordinate their operations with the overall strategy of the Allies. He then reviewed the military and political situation of the contending Powers, leading up to the conclusion that an Allied victory was at hand. The time had therefore come for all Albanians to lay aside their personal differences and to unite to wrest from the invaders the independence for which they had already sacrificed so much.

Abas Kupi replied at some length, but, it seemed to me, wearily, as if he had lost faith in the power of words. He welcomed us to his regions with warmth and courtesy, and expressed his deep indignation that Albanians should have been responsible for the capture of Brigadier Davies. A harsh winter and lack of arms had forced him on to the defensive; but now that we had come he hoped that we would soon make it possible for him to lead a new and final rising against the Germans. From these preliminaries he turned to questions of policy. His people were at a loss to understand why Albania was not among the United Nations, or why the Allies did not recognise King Zog who, as he remarked, had been a victim of Fascist aggression when Mr. Neville Chamberlain still believed in peace. They were anxious, moreover, for the future of the Kossovo and of Southern Albania and hoped for some assurance that these provinces would not be ceded to Yugoslavia or Greece without first consulting the wishes of the local populations. Our support of the Albanian Communists was also a cause of deep concern; and it was widely believed that, at the Teheran Conference, Albania had been assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence.

" We Albanians," he concluded, " are few and poor, but in proportion to our strength we have made great efforts and great sacrifices in the common cause. So far we have received

*669 648 186 no encouragement nor recognition from the great Allies; but I still put my trust in Great Britain as I did in 1940. I have fought and I will continue to fight, but you must send me arms and make some gesture that you have our country's interest at heart, for we are Albanian patriots and not British agents."

Maclean turned a gentle answer, judging that it would be premature to try and thrash out these delicate problems at our first meeting. He proposed, however, that I should go to Abas Kupi's Headquarters to study his difficulties and explain our policy in greater detail. The Agha at once agreed, and, before leaving us, promised to send guides within a few days to bring me to him. Meanwhile we turned to the task of reorganising the British Missions.

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000 SEYMOUR and Hare had established their base in Derye because it was near to the Tirana road and thus suitable as an observation post. The very conditions, however, which made the village easily accessible to visitors or couriers from the capital exposed it to the danger of sudden enemy raids. The British officers were thus obliged to lead a strictly conspiratorial existence, which severely restricted the scope of their activities. They seldom ventured out in daylight; most of their business was conducted through intermediaries; and fear of detection forced them to relegate their wireless set and operator to a rear base in the mountains. This rear base was a day's march away, so that all communictions with Headquarters in Italy suffered a delay of at least twenty-four hours. The drawbacks of this situation had hitherto been outweighed by its advantages; Seymour and Hare might indeed have enjoyed greater freedom and security in some remote mountain village, but, under winter conditions, they would then have been cut off from their chief sources of intelligence and supply. Now, however, that the snow was melting and that the mountain paths were practicable once more, Derye ceased to be convenient without becoming safe. There were already rumours that the Germans had wind of the Mission's whereabouts; and Maclean therefore

decided that we should move at once and set up a new base in the mountains. There we might hope to operate our wireless sets undisturbed and even to receive "supply drops" from Italy. Accordingly three days later, on the 24th April, we took leave of the headman Kiamil and slipped out of Derye with some fifteen bodyguards and mulemen. Our destination was the village of Ziber, situated at a height of some 3500 feet on the north flank of the great range which divides the Mati from the Shupal valleys. Ziber was remote from the main lines of communication, but within an hour of Seymour's rear base, and reputed a Zogist stronghold.

We climbed for some four hours up steep and wooded paths. Hare was mounted, for he was still very lame; but the rest of us went on foot to train our wind and harden our muscles. Our kit, however, was loaded on to mules and our obliging bodyguards volunteered to carry the successive coats and sweaters which we peeled off on the march. We trudged for some four hours up steep paths through the forests, and soon after dark reached the village of Selit, nearly two thousand feet above sea-level, where we were hospitably entertained in the house of a small sheep farmer.

Soft mattresses were spread for us that night, but my hopes of sleep were intercepted by a formidable offensive of bed-bugs, nicknamed "tanks" by the guerillas. The ingenuity and persistence of these creatures were indeed remarkable; and we observed that when deterred from a direct advance against a mattress by a barrier of insect powder they were capable of ascending to the ceiling to drop like parachutists on to their sleeping victims. Our powers of adaptability, however, seem to be infinite; and in time I became inured to bed-bugs, as indeed to the lice which we insensibly picked up from our bodyguards and visitors.

We left Selit in the morning, and, passing through cold beech forests, toiled up the bare mountainside to the Qafa Murresit, or Pass of Mulberry Trees. A thunderstorm broke upon us in the early afternoon; but the clouds lifted just as we reached the head of the pass, and a watery sun lit up our first distant view of the northern slopes of Mati and the forbidden

000 mountains of Mirdita beyond. Ziber lay an hour below. We waited, therefore, in the woods until it was dark, and then descended unobserved to the house of a certain Captain Kurti, who held the village for the Zogists.

Ziber was only a short march from Seymour's rear base and it was there that our gear had been dropped on the night of our first and unsuccessful attempt to jump into Albania. Some of it was now returned to us; but the light-fingered villagers who had volunteered to help bring it in had absconded with the greater part, including two thousand gold sovereigns. The good Captain Kurti eventually recovered the gold by the exercise of moral persuasion, seconded by threats of physical violence. Our effects, however, remained a dead loss, among them most of our carefully selected library and a magnificent black sheepskin coat, a gift to me from John Bennett, who had bought it off the back of a policeman on point-duty in Belgrade.

The theft of our library was a serious blow; for guerilla operations, like all forms of warfare, involve an unconscionable amount of waiting. For the rest, our losses were probably a blessing in disguise; in the mountains possessions are only an encumbrance; and when necessary we could always send in to Tirana for replacements. On principle, indeed, each of us aimed at having no more kit than we could carry on our riding mules. Theft and enemy action soon wore away any surplus, and for nearly eight months the sum of my worldly goods amounted to an overcoat, a sleeping-bag, two spare shirts, some underclothes, stockings, and washing material. The overcoat and sleeping-bags were rolled up fore and aft of the saddle and the rest was packed into two saddle-bags and a small haversack. This last contained the indispensable minimum which I might carry on my back without discomfort if forced to abandon my mount and run for it.

Our Headquarters had been studiously vague as to the position in international law of liaison officers with *franc-tireur* formations. The experience of others was hardly encouraging; but a superstition lingered that we should not be shot as spies if captured in uniform. Our clothes were therefore designed

to preserve our military status while assuring our comfort; 000
but, despite our badges of rank and decorations, we seldom contrived to look anything but irregular. Maclean wore light Albanian sandals, jodhpurs, and a heavy, green regimental tunic. Smiley favoured corduroy trousers and a battledress blouse. My own clothes were a hard-wearing cord tunic and trousers, the latter tucked Russian fashion into soft knee-length field-boots. These were heavy, but a great protection against rocks and thorns, and invaluable in the uncertainties of the night march. Mindful of Napoleon's dictum on the importance of an army's stomach, each of us wore a broad sash wound about his waist. This was a most necessary, as well as colourful, garment, protecting our digestions from insidious changes of temperature and fortifying them against the successive feasts and fasts of an outlaw's life. For arms each of us carried a Merlin submachine-gun and a Colt ·45 automatic. The submachine-gun was accurate up to about two hundred yards and deadly in an ambush. Its moral effect, moreover, was as great as its killing power; and an irresolute enemy was often driven back merely by its noise and rate of fire. The ·45 Colt was intended for our personal protection in camp or in the house; it was very powerful at close range; and a single shot from it might knock down an assailant, even if it only hit him in the hand.

On arriving in Ziber our[1] attention had at once been 669*
engaged by the presence in a neighbouring village of nineteen 648
British officers and men: the remnant of the various Missions scattered in the disasters of the previous winter. Their chief concern, and indeed duty, had been first to survive, and then to recover their strength, of which frostbite and illness had taken a heavy toll. There was indeed little else that they could have done; for the winter and Abas Kupi's policy of expectant neutrality had made offensive operations impossible. For several months now Hare and Seymour had formed the only active part of the Mission. The others had accordingly been relegated to the safety of the mountains, where they had nothing to do but guard the wireless set and collect the occa-

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[1] [i.e. Amery's liaison group -- Analyst]

669 648 sional supplies that were dropped from Italy. There they had waited for the spring; herded into a single room, often short of food though not, apparently, of alcohol, and a prey to all the demoralising influences of boredom and inactivity.

Maclean was rightly determined that our Mission should carry as little ballast as possible, and at once decided to be rid of a concentration of men who had to be fed and protected but could not be usefully employed. The greater part were therefore sent south for evacuation by sea from the coastal area held by the Partisans. A few, however, were kept to strengthen the three other British Missions in Northern Albania, whose activities Maclean was to co-ordinate. The most northerly of these was in the region of Nikai and Mertur, beyond the Kukes–Scutari road: there Squadron-Leader Neel and Captain Hibberdine maintained intermittent contact with Gani Kryeziu and watched the situation among the Catholic tribes. The next consisted of Major Riddle, Captain Simcox, Captain Lis — a Polish officer — and Lieutenant Hibbert. The valley of the Black Drin was their area; and they worked with Muharrem Bairaktar and the chiefs of Dibra. Finally, Captain Smythe kept a lonely watch in the Peza region, south of Tirana, where Zogist and Partisan influences intermingled. By a fortunate coincidence Hibberdine was already at Seymour's rear base; and Maclean now sent for Riddle and Smythe to tell us of the situation in their districts.

000 Our presence in Ziber was a source of considerable profit to the villagers; they earned a subsidy by providing us with a guard, sold us food at exorbitant prices and improved every opportunity of pilfering our stores. We had little, therefore, to fear from their indiscretion; and indeed the bonds of interest which united them to our cause were fortified by the knowledge that they would suffer dire reprisals from the Germans if we were discovered, and from Abas Kupi if we were betrayed. Nevertheless their constant attentions were expensive and wearisome; and there was always the risk that some stranger passing through the village might see us and spread the news abroad. We decided, therefore, to abandon the haunts of men

and to pitch a camp high on the range between the Mati and the Shupal valleys.

The selection of a site was entrusted to Smiley, and his choice fell upon a clearing some two hundred feet below the crest of the range on the wooded, north-western slopes of Mount Bastar. The ground was steep, but suitable as a " dropping ground " for supplies; and the surrounding woods offered cover from air observation and, to some extent, from the elements. In these woods, therefore, we rigged up the wireless stations, built kitchens, and presently pitched tents improvised out of parachutes. To assure our comfort and mobility we then acquired a score of mountain ponies and mules from neighbouring villages and pastured them on the grass of the clearing. Food we obtained daily from the villages of Ziber and Bastar, on opposite sides of the range. Once a week, moreover, our team of mules mingled with the many trains of pack-animals which wound their way into Tirana on market day and returned laden with green vegetables, Italian wines, and other luxuries. For news of the outside world we relied on a portable wireless, on the Albanian and German press, and on the news-letters and periodicals which we had dropped to us with our mail. Our war-chest amounted to some four thousand gold sovereigns, and was buried under Smiley's bed; but each of us carried besides a hundred sovereigns for emergency or current expenses. Gold was our most powerful weapon, but two-edged, and as we valued our lives we handled it with the utmost secrecy.

Besides the three of us, Hare and Seymour, our Mission included Lieutenants Bullock and Merret, Sergeants Jones and Jenkins, and two wireless operators, Corporals Otter and Collins. Bullock was a Rhodesian, friendly, but so quiet that we never learned what had made him volunteer for service in the Balkans. Merret for his part was a sensitive young man with literary pretensions, and had been drawn to Albania by the romantic appeal of a war of liberation. A grim winter in the Prokletia Alps, however, had shown him a side of human nature hitherto unknown and had robbed him of his last illusions about the Albanians. Bitter experience of their

000 failings blinded him to their virtues; he pined for his native Cheshire, and sought an escape from the violence and cruelty of the Balkans in the gentler company of our Italian prisoners.

Sergeants Jenkins and Jones were by contrast free of illusions and tough of mind and body. Jones was a red-headed guardsman, cool and much enduring; Jenkins a dark, Celtic-looking fellow, slow spoken but quick witted and possessed of a keen sense of the ridiculous. I once heard him say of a certain senior officer that he looked like " an egg with teeth in it "; surely the perfect description of Colonel Blimp. Both were skilled and courageous saboteurs and, though they shared the ancient prejudice that the niggers begin at Calais, they were liked and trusted by the mountaineers.

Corporals Otter and Collins were the sheet anchors of the Mission, for they alone understood the mysteries of wireless; and we depended on them entirely for the maintenance of communications with Italy. The wireless sets were contained each in a medium-sized suitcase and were run off ordinary batteries which had to be charged at frequent intervals by a cumbersome petrol engine. The set by itself could be carried by hand when necessary, but to transport the whole equipment required two mules. The duties of the wireless operators were exacting; for, besides the upkeep of their apparatus and the work of transmission, they were also responsible for the enciphering or deciphering of every message.

There were also more than a dozen Italians attached to our Mission: some had been taken prisoner at the time of the Italian armistice; others had since sought our protection; and yet others we had bought from the Albanians. They were cheerful fellows, serving mostly as cooks or batmen, while one of them, who had been a medical orderly, acted as the Mission's doctor. There were two officers among them: Captain Franco, a stolid but cultured Florentine, and Lieutenant Mario, a gay young Neapolitan with a fine tenor. As helots in our camp their position was invidious; but both acted throughout with great discretion and were to prove staunch companions in a crisis.

Our Albanian staff consisted of three interpreters, Halit, Shaqir, and Veli. Halit was a young Mati chieftain and spoke French; a big-boned, blond fellow, he was brave as a lion, possessed of boundless energy, and, which was rare among Albanians, knew how to make others work. Shaqir was a schoolmaster from Shengyerg, rather euphemistically surnamed "the Bold", and spoke some English; he was the jester of the company and, through his brother, organised our courier system with Tirana. Veli was a Tosk and had for several years been orderly to General Percy, the Inspector-General of the Albanian gendarmerie. He spoke quite good English and in his well-kept battledress looked just like an English soldier. We employed besides a score of Albanians who served us as bodyguards and mulemen. Among them was one Arslan, who guarded Smiley, but was in normal times a village *hoja*. 000

The defence of our base was entrusted to the Zogist villagers of Ziber and Bastar, who undertook to mount a guard each night for our protection. In practice they often failed even to post sentries; but, since the only paths leading to our camp ran through their villages, we might reasonably hope to receive some warning of the approach of an enemy.

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We were still busy with details of organisation when, as arranged at Derye, a young Zogist officer came with a small escort to conduct me to Abas Kupi. We rode all afternoon through forests of beech and pine, broken by broad stretches of barren scree. Darkness overtook us just as we crossed the range into the Shupal valley, but the moon rose early, and we pushed on until towards midnight we reached the straggling village of Bruz. There I was welcomed by Abas Kupi's eighteen-year-old son, Petrit, who held the place with a small force of Zogists. His father was still an hour's march away; and seeing that it was late, Petrit suggested that I should spend the night as his guest. I accepted gladly, for I had been eight hours in the saddle; and he led the way into a low, single- 574

574 storied house, where a score of Zogist guerillas were gathered [342] round the fire. The room was filled with smoke — for the house had no chimney, like many in Albania — and it was several minutes before I could see or breathe in comfort. I sat down, however, by the hearth, where a carpet had been spread, and while the evening meal was made ready had some talk with Petrit. He spoke quite good French, having studied in the French *lycée* at Korcha, where, by a strange irony, Enver Hoja had been his teacher. He was obviously eager for news of the outside world, and the flow of his questions was only restrained by his sense of courtesy as my host. In appearance he was not unlike his father, though of sturdier build and more slothful movements; and I was told that he had already distinguished himself in the previous autumn's fighting. He was possessed besides of a natural authority, and, despite his youth, seemed to command the respect of the wild mountaineers who accompanied him. Some of these spoke a little Italian or Serb, and their discussions that night gave me a first impression of [521] Zogist public opinion. The Ghegs are not great talkers like the Greeks or Slavs, but I felt, from what they said, that they were rather suspicious of British intentions and far more concerned with preventing the spread of Communism in Albania than with fighting the Germans. Towards one o'clock [262] our conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the evening meal of soup, boiled mutton and cheese. We ate in silence [513] and as soon as we had finished I retired to rest on one of the mattresses which the master of the house had spread for us on the floor.

342 Next day, in the afternoon, Petrit accompanied me to the place where Abas Kupi had made his temporary headquarters. It was a grey stone keep, built on a jutting rib of the mountain range and approached by a path so narrow and precipitous that I had to send back my horse and make the last stage of the journey on foot. Abas Kupi came out to meet me, as I turned [576] into the walled courtyard of the house, and welcomed me with the traditional greeting of "*Tungjatjeta*" — "May your life be prolonged". He led the way up a flight of wooden steps, resting like a ladder against the wall of the house, and took

me by the hand into a dark and dusty room, hung with rifles 342
and submachine-guns. It was thronged with Zogist notables
and their bodyguards: wild and rugged men, corrugated with 714
cartridge-belts, and festooned with pistols, daggers, and handgrenades. Most of them were dressed in black, baggy Turkish breeches, braided homespun jackets of black or brown, with multicoloured sashes wound about their waists, and white fezes or skull-caps on their heads. A few besides were in uniform retained from the time of their service in the Albanian army, or looted from the Italians; while others, especially the leaders, wore tweed or leather jackets, variously combined with local or military costume.

We sat down, Turkish fashion, by the fire; and, while we 574
drank coffee and exchanged greetings, the guerillas milled [521]
around, or sat together in small groups, whispering intently. To a stranger this whispering seemed sinister and blatantly conspiratorial, but the others took no offence at it. Necessity indeed imposed a communal way of life on the guerillas; each man was watched by his fellows in his every movement, and it was only by whispering that any privacy of discussion could be preserved.

I had been there perhaps half an hour when, at a sign from 669*
Abas Kupi, the guerillas filed out of the room, and we remained 648
alone with Shaqir, my interpreter, and Colonel Murad Basha. Basha had been a regular officer under King Zog and had joined Abas Kupi in Belgrade in 1940. He was now the Zogist Chief-of-Staff, but struck me from the first as pedantic and too quick to see the difficulties in any scheme. He was indeed to prove a defeatist influence at the Zogist Headquarters, for, though personally no coward, he was terrified of action, like so many senior officers who have won their spurs on the square rather than in the field.

I began our discussions by showing Abas Kupi my creden-
tials: these were a letter from Stirling, who had been his [576]
friend, and a *besa* given me by King Zog. This was a covenant enjoining upon all Albanians the duty of protecting my life and, should their zeal prove unavailing, of avenging my death. My *bona fides* thus established I recalled our meeting in Belgrade

*669 648 in 1940 and asked the Agha to tell me of his experiences in the years between. I wanted to hear the story for its own sake, and thought besides that his interpretation of the past would afford the most natural explanation of his present outlook. He[1] smiled and began the detailed narrative of his adventures, enlivened by occasional flashes of sardonic humour, but unadorned except for matter-of-fact accounts of his own feelings at the time. He spoke in a low voice, prodding the glowing embers on the hearth as he talked, and looking up every now and then to see if the point of his sentence had reached me through the interpreter. It was near midnight before he had done; but it was a good story, and through it shone the consistency of the man and the skill with which he had preserved his independence from all those who had sought to use him for their own ends. Of these we were but the latest; and, next day, in a brief message to Maclean, I wrote: "Here is a fish whom many have hooked but none have ever landed".

[665] We continued our talks in the morning and discussed the structure and policy of the Zogist movement. Its main fighting strength was drawn from the regions of Mati, Kruya, and Tirana, each of which had some special connection with the royalist cause. Zog was a man of Mati, and in his reign the valley had grown rich above all other districts in Albania. Tirana had been his chosen capital, whose claims he had consistently defended against the rival cities of Scutari and Valona. As for Kruya, it was Abas Kupi's birthplace, and he had governed it for fifteen years under the King. The Agha claimed that the clans in these three districts might muster ten thousand men; but they were ill-equipped and desperately short of ammunition. The movement, however, was spreading beyond Central Albania and already commanded the support of a number of former army and gendarmerie officers, the bulk of the Tirana merchants as well as certain Gheg chieftains and prominent Tosks. I was given the list of the members of the Central Committee and recognised the names of several well-known men, mostly landowners or intellectuals, but with a good record of opposition against the Italians.

The Agha's immediate aim was to build up alliances with

[1] [i.e. Abas Kupi, leader of Zogist movement--Analyst]

the chiefs of Dibra and of the Catholic tribes beyond the Drin. 669*
He made no secret, however, of the advances that had been 648
made to him by the Tirana Government and the Balli Kombetar, and told me frankly of his contacts with the " collaborationist " leaders. These men knew as well as he did that the Germans had lost the war, and were only too anxious to " work their passage home ". He saw no reason, therefore, why he should not exploit such influence as they still possessed; for it was not in his nature to hate or to persecute those whom he no longer feared.

I now broached the subject of the Partisans, but saw at once that he regarded them as enemies. They were indeed the real danger to his cause, as contrasted with the " collaborationists " whose power to hurt him had long been on the wane. His natural inclination had been to destroy them before they grew too strong and he had only refrained from attacking them out of respect for the wishes of the British. I urged various arguments upon him in favour of reconciliation, but, though he agreed to its advantages, he doubted whether it was any longer possible.

" If you will impose friendship between us," he said, " I shall be glad. But I know these men and, *Wallahi!* they will not have it."

We now turned to the critical subject of military action. The Agha regarded himself as at war with the Germans and pointed to the presence of British military Missions on his territory as proof of this claim. He admitted, indeed, that he had not taken the offensive since the autumn; but the winter had been harsh, and all his energies had gone into building up a strong organisation with which he might lead a general rising when the time came. The people besides had been demoralised by the failure of their revolt the year before. The British Missions had incited them to action; there had been no British landing; instead their homes had been burnt, their relatives interned, and their flocks carried off. The Germans were not as pestilential as the Italians, but they were ruthless fellows, and the tribesmen would hesitate to attack them again, at least until we sent them arms and ammunition. The time

648 [*669] had surely come, moreover, for the Allies to take the Albanian people into their confidence; they had made great sacrifices for a nation of only a million people; and, if they were now called upon to shed their blood once more, they deserved to be told what was to be their future. Meanwhile he could only repeat his demands for the recognition by the Allies of King Zog, the inclusion of Albania among the United Nations, and an assurance that the fate of the frontier provinces would not be settled without first consulting the wishes of their inhabitants.

We broke off our discussions for the midday meal and afterwards I prolonged the hour of siesta, reflecting on the Agha's words and preparing my answer. The substance of his remarks was that he saw no prospect of reaching agreement with the Partisans, and that the Zogists would require supplies of arms and certain political concessions before they could again attack the Germans. As I saw it the second of these two issues comprehended the first. The two parties would probably fail to come to terms of their own accord, but British intervention might still impose an uneasy alliance and so avert civil war. Such intervention, however, would scarcely be justified unless both parties were already engaged against the Germans. To bring the Zogists into action, therefore, was not only an end desirable in itself but also the only means whereby the rival resistance movements might still be reconciled.

Having thus simplified my problem, I had next to consider how to persuade Abas Kupi to take the field. I knew for certain that the Foreign Office would never grant such political concessions as he had requested; nor could I hope that our Headquarters would send him arms until he had first given proof of his good faith by renewing the attack. Words are seldom by themselves sufficient to alter the direction of a political movement. A first step, however, to bringing him back into the war was to answer his objections and show good cause why he should fight. I had therefore to make it plain that, in the British view, the onus was on him to win military and political support by his actions and not on us to induce him to engage the common enemy. To this end I now worked out a line of argument which in its essentials was to become our Mission's "party line". When we renewed our talks that afternoon I tried it out for the first time.

"I was in Belgrade," I began, "when you joined us there in the dark days of 1940; and no one knows better than I how much you have done in the common cause. If I speak frankly then it is because I know that you are our friend." It might be that in the past justice had not been done to Albania. But if mistakes had been made the task of correcting them was infinitely complicated by the intestine divisions of the Albanians. Abas Kupi had asked that we should recognise King Zog; but the Partisans were implacably opposed to his restoration; and the Partisans were fighting the Germans. He had proposed the formation of an Albanian Government in London; but there was no agreement among the Albanian political parties and we could not tell which of them most nearly represented the will of the Albanian people. He had also demanded Albania's inclusion among the United Nations, but there was as yet no Albanian sovereign body with which that organisation might treat. It was all most regrettable but it was not altogether our fault: for the time being, therefore, we could only pledge ourselves to restore Albania to independence. He had spoken, too, of self-determination for the Kossovo and Southern Albania. The Yugoslavs and Greeks, however, also had some claim to these regions and they were fighting the Germans. We only wanted to see justice done, but we were not alone among the Allies; and he must realise that Albania's claims might well be prejudiced by his continued inactivity.

He had asked that we should send him arms. This had been our chief purpose in coming to Albania, and we should do so on as large a scale as possible as soon as he took the field. We might wish to do so before, but there were strong reasons why we could not. Our arsenals were not inexhaustible, and from all over Europe and Asia came appeals for arms from men who were fighting the enemy with their bare hands. In Albania the Partisans were already at war and we should be very wrong to reduce their supplies in favour of a non-belligerent. The Agha had told us that the Zogists were our

648 friends while the Partisans were only instruments of Russia. It might be true, but we could not for that divert arms from their men who were fighting to his who were not. The Russians were our allies and to do so would be to invite Russian accusations that we were thinking more about our post-war interests than about the prosecution of the war. No doubt the Russians also had an eye on the future, but at least the Communists justified the support they got by the number of Germans they killed. It was up to the Zogists to do the same; for we should certainly not weaken our alliance with Russia for their sake. Hitler's last hope was to divide us and we meant to disappoint him. The Agha might guess for himself where our sympathies lay; Great Britain was not a monarchy for nothing, but the Zogists must prove their worth if they wanted our support.

" If you fight," I concluded, " we will send you arms. If you fight we will do all in our power to resolve your differences with the Partisans. Play your part and we will play ours. The future of your King and country is in your own hands."

Abas Kupi was plainly disconcerted by these arguments, and for some moments after I had done there was a stony silence. It was indeed scarcely to be expected that we should reach agreement so early; and he may well have believed that, just as he had pitched his own demands high, so there might be an element of bargaining in my absolute rejection of all concessions. I was convinced, however, by the tone of an altercation which now arose between Abas Kupi and Murad Basha that Abas wanted to fight but was held back by unseen forces. These might be merely lack of arms, or perhaps the contrary opinions of his supporters, but in either case he would be unlikely to admit to them for fear of losing prestige in our eyes. If my instinct was right, we should make no further progress by direct negotiations until we had studied the Zogist movement for ourselves. I had heard that the Agha was soon to make a progress through Mati and Kruya and therefore asked if Maclean and I might accompany him. This would give us the chance of meeting the Zogist chiefs and members of the Central Committee, and of gauging the state of public opinion for ourselves. He welcomed the proposal; and the tension between us was insensibly eased by the prospect of a further exchange of views. 648

It was already dark when we made an end of our discussions, but Abas Kupi none the less decided that we should move that same evening to another village. I thought at first [261] that this was a precaution against surprise attacks but, on enquiry, was told the simpler truth: in the two days that we had been there the bodyguard had devoured such food as the village could spare and no more could be obtained for the evening meal without straining the loyalty of the inhabitants. Hunger indeed was the sternest taskmaster of the guerillas, and the struggle to find food kept them continually on the move. We set out, therefore, into the night and, after an hour's march, came to a village where I was lodged with Abas Kupi and his staff in a large, two-storied house.

A blizzard sprang up in the night and we woke to find the face of the mountains whitened with snow. I was impatient to join Maclean and discuss my impressions with him, but the fury of the elements kept us indoors all day. By next morning, however, the gale had dropped; I therefore took leave of Abas Kupi and, crossing the range, rode back into the camp at dusk.

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TWELVE days had passed since we had landed in Albania 1/1 727 and we had by now reorganised the network of British Missions and assured our own mobility and communications with Headquarters. Our next task was to complete a reconnaissance of the situation which confronted us. According to our information there were some twenty-five thousand German troops in Albania, belonging, most of them, to the XXI Mountain Corps. The Corps Headquarters were in Tirana, and controlled the 297th Infantry Division, deployed in Central and Southern Albania, and the 181st Mountain Division, based on Scutari.[1] There were besides some units in the South belonging to the

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[1] The 181st Mountain Division was also responsible for internal security in Southern Montenegro.

1/1 [i.e. on the night of 18th April, 1944 -- Analyst]

[727] XXII Mountain Corps, whose Headquarters were at Yannina. The Kossovo was independently garrisoned, mainly by the German-officered Albanian division, S.S. Skanderbeg. The *669 Partisans, who now formed the chief Albanian resistance movement, were reported to have nearly fifteen thousand men under arms. Except, however, for insignificant groups these were all among the Tosks, south of the river Shkumbi. The Ballist forces were also concentrated in the South and about Tirana, but were now reduced to little more than five thousand men. We were thus tolerably informed of the numbers and circumstances of our German enemies and Partisan allies, but knew almost nothing of the military potentialities of the Zogist movement in particular, or of the Ghegs in general. Maclean and I therefore set out on 3rd May to join Abas Kupi and study conditions in Mati and Kruya for ourselves. Meanwhile Smiley and Hare remained at base to reconnoitre the precise dispositions of the Germans and to take soundings of opinion in Tirana.

[342] Abas Kupi and his staff had assembled in the fortress home of Tsen Lezi,[1] set in a cleft in the mountains high above the Mati valley. We joined him there about nightfall and found [352] the Zogist leaders seated round the hearth at the end of a long and narrow hall, lit only by the flames of the fire. The skins of sheep and goats were spread out on the floor as carpets, and the walls and rude crossbeams which supported the roof were black and shiny with soot. So must have been the keep of Dunsinane. Tsen Lezi, the master of the house, was wild and woolly like an aged bear, and grunted as he ambled out to greet us. His eyes were small and bright; his bushy moustache sprouted in all directions; and his clothes were brown and furry, homespun from the shearings of his sheep. 576 He ruled sternly over his family, or clan, for there were more than sixty of them living in the house, and directed every detail of dynastic policy: what land or livestock should be bought or sold, which of the children should be sent to school, what marriages should be made, what blood feuds prosecuted

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[1] A Mati chieftain, not to be confused with the Dibran leader, Tsen Elezi.

or compounded and, above all, what sides the clan should take 596 in the strife of political factions. Tsen Lezi had long been a supporter of Abas Kupi and he received us well.

It was already May, but in the mountains we had still lived /33 amid the gales and snow of winter. Next morning, however, as we descended from Tsen Lezi's house, we came out of the mists into the sunlight and saw the broad Mati valley spread out below us like a promised land. Fat sheep and cattle grazed in the undulating pastures; whitewashed houses, the tallest in Albania, were scattered over the low, wooded hills; and beyond the sparkling river the ground rose steeply to the wild glens of Mirdita. The guerillas had not left the mountains since autumn; and now, at the sight of the sunlit valley, the long line of men winding down the hillside broke into a strident song. Presently Abas Kupi called a halt and we sat down to refresh our eyes with the view. Hitherto I had always looked on mountains as holiday grounds; but the guerillas' song touched some atavistic chord in me and for the first time I experienced the weary highlander's longing for the plain.

Mati was rich and populated, the region where the tribal /01 system of the mountains mingled with the feudalism of the coastal plain. The land and flocks were still owned and worked in common by the different clans; but their chiefs were already known as *Beys*; and the wealthier among them employed hired labour and rented out some of their fields to poorer families. The men of Mati were reputed devout Moslems and, as is often the way of the pious, they lived well; renowned for their lavish hospitality and comfortably appointed houses. They had prospered especially under the monarchy; for King Zog was a man of Mati and his first care had been 143 for the people of his valley. Many, though they could not [212] read nor write, had been given appointments in the civil service; and, following the tradition of the Turks, Zog had conferred reserve commissions on most of the *Beys*. This was not indeed to compel them to military service, but to bind them more closely to his cause by the payment of an honourable and regular pension. The valley had benefited, moreover, 653 from an ambitious programme of public works; a road and

[653] several bridges had been built; and Burrel had been made 643 the model provincial capital of Albania. The grateful memory of these past benefits and a just pride in their king's achievements in a broader field were fortified by the lapse in the payment of pensions which had followed his expulsion. The men of Mati were thus staunch for King Zog; we found his picture in almost every house we visited, and at night, sitting round the fire, listened to tales of his adventures and even epic poems celebrating his exploits. There were of course exceptions, as I learned one night when I asked a veteran chieftain why he had embraced the Zogist cause. The cunning old warrior eyed me closely and answered with a wealth of meaning: "I am a monarchist in case the King should come back."

*669 Our progress through the valley was leisurely and public, and indeed was intended by Abas Kupi as a demonstration to show the Zogist flag and to parade the new British Mission — the outward and visible sign of Allied support. We had brought horses with us, but the marches were short, and Abas Kupi always went on foot with his men. As a mark of respect, therefore, we left our bodyguards to lead our beasts and followed his example. We marched escorted by a bodyguard of a hundred picked guerillas, a force sufficient both to overawe any local opposition and to prevent the Germans from attacking us with anything less than a battalion. Of this indeed there was little risk; for the bridges over the Mati had been blown in the rising against the Italians, and an enemy would have had to leave his transports at the entrance to the valley. We should thus have had ample warning of his approach and would have ambushed him, or dispersed into the hills. The Germans, however, wisely preferred to let sleeping dogs lie. They knew that Abas Kupi's relations with the Partisans were strained, and, despite the presence of British officers in his camp, had no intention of diverting him from his domestic conflicts by an ill-timed and provocative attack.

000 We passed through rolling fields and leafy forests; and each day brought us to some new village where we were feasted by the clans. Their houses varied in size and archi-

Their houses[1] varied in size and architecture with the wealth of the owners; but all were essentially 342 built for defence. As a rule, they were so situated as to command a good field of fire over their chief approaches, and were often surrounded by walled courtyards entered through heavy, wooden gates studded with iron. For the most part they were of wood and stone, sometimes whitewashed, and consisted of two stories, joined by a narrow indoor staircase, or by a flight of wooden steps on the outside. The ground floor was the cattle and the women's quarters; above was the guest-room. This guest-room was the centre of the life of the house, and, except for a stout chest in which the valuables of the family were stored, was altogether empty of furniture. At one end of it was the open hearth from which the smoke escaped through chinks in the wall or, in statelier mansions, through a chimney. Narrow windows, usually without panes, served as a means of ventilation or, on occasion, as rifle slits; but so dim was the light which they diffused that it was often difficult to read indoors, even at midday. At night the room would be lit by the glow of the fire, or sometimes by oil lamps or pinewood torches.

On entering a house we[2] would take off our boots and give 574 up our rifles to the host, though retaining our side arms. As 576 foreigners, we would then be led to the place of honour, which is on the right-hand side of the hearth, next to the wall. Abas Kupi would sit with us, or take the left-hand side, and the rest of the company, including bodyguards and orderlies, assembled in a horse shoe round the fire. The youngest sat at the apex of the horse shoe, and, since there were often a score of us, the evening would begin with much show of "Friend go up higher". We sat on carpets or sheepskin rugs, cross-legged or reclining against our saddle-bags. When all [276] were seated, the host rolled cigarettes, which only non-smokers might refuse, and tossed them with unfailing accuracy to each guest. Presently a warm drink would be served, usually coffee, though in the poorer houses sweetened or salted milk was often brought instead. As outlaws we sought to keep our movements secret and our arrival was, as a rule, the first warning of our visit which the host received. Custom demanded that he serve us

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[1] [i.e. in the Mati valley--Analyst]

[2] [British liaison officers in early 1944--Analyst]

576 meat, and, since several hours might pass before the sheep or
574 kid had been killed and made ready, it was often past midnight
before we had eaten.

While the meal was cooking we variously slept or talked
and let the bodyguards dry damp clothes by the fire or massage
our weary limbs. Sometimes, to beguile the time, one of the
[533] company would recite from the long epic poems in which the
Albanians record the exploits of their heroes. They were
weird, monotonous laments, sung in a high-pitched nasal voice
to the accompaniment of a one-stringed mandolin. An hour
[273] or so before the meal was served flasks of *raki* would be
brought, accompanied by *mese* of onions, cheese, and sometimes
hard-boiled eggs or lumps of grilled meat. *Raki* is a
fiery, colourless spirit, made from the pulp of grapes, or sometimes,
like *slivovitz*, from plums. Among the mountaineers it
was usually home-brewed, and varied greatly in quality and
strength. The principal guests would each receive a small
flask, the shape of an old-fashioned burgundy flagon, and
holding perhaps half a pint, while the rest of the company
fared according to the resources of the host, sharing a flask
between two or three. Toasts were drunk to the traditional
greeting of " *Tungjatjeta* " — " May your life be prolonged " ;
and, though the mountaineers habitually drank to excess,
they seldom failed to comport themselves with grave, if sometimes
mellowed, dignity.

When the cooking was done Maclean, as the chief guest,
would be asked if the meal might be served ; there was never
[521] conversation after meals, and so the greatest compliment which
he could pay his host and fellows was to ask for a postponement.
264 As soon, however, as he had given his assent, a circular wooden
table some five feet in diameter would be carried in, standing
about six inches from the ground. Round this a dozen of us
would assemble, sitting cross-legged, but in a crocodile, each
sideways on to the table so as to make room for as many as
possible. We would then each be given a spoon as our sole
piece of cutlery and with this helped ourselves to the more
liquid dishes at the centre of the table. There were no plates,
so that each spoon plied steadily backwards and forwards

between the individual mouth and the communal dish. More [264] solid foods, such as meat or rice, were eaten with the fingers, 262 and, since each dish was communal, those who ate slowly went hungry. The midday and evening meals were both known as "*buk*", or bread; for theoretically, and in the poorer houses practically, maize bread was the basic foodstuff, while the other dishes were regarded merely as sauces to make the bread more palatable.

In the course of our journeys we touched life at many angles and experienced extremes of poverty and plenty. Often we were lucky to get even a lump of cheese and maize bread, or a cup of unsweetened milk. At other times, especially in Mati, we were surfeited by a wealthy host on successive dishes of eggs, boiled mutton, roast mutton *pilaf*, and luscious *halvas* and *baklavas* in the Turkish style. As a general rule, however, Albanian fare was lacking in variety and the average meal might be a soup of beans, a dish of boiled mutton, and a bowl of milk or *yoghourt*. The guest of honour usually received [576] the sheep's head — the brain and eyes were considered the greatest delicacies — or sometimes the kidneys and the tail. Fatness was the quality most admired in sheep, though even with hard exercise all of us except Smiley found the enjoyment of lumps of hot boiled fat an acquired taste. Milk was the usual drink at meals, drunk like soup from a communal bowl and served as a last course. Water was also to be had, but only on request, for there was usually only one glass or mug in the house. Before and after meals the host came round 264 with a basin and ewer, and the guests washed their hands— [515] a most necessary proceeding seeing that these were used for eating. In the richer houses the washing water was warmed and home-made soap was also provided. Each man left the table when he had finished eating without waiting for his fellows; and when the chief guests had done there would be a "deuxième service" for the rest of the company, or sometimes two tables might be set at once. The guests had the right — and often used it — to criticise any meanness in their entertainment to their host's face; and he would never sit at table or taste food until the last of the guests had eaten.

513 When all had done,[1] mattresses and eiderdowns would be brought and spread out on the floor for the half-dozen guests of honour, while the others made themselves as comfortable as they might with their overcoats and jackets. It was still considered rather indecent to undress, but before the lights were snuffed out the prudent ones would gather their arms and effects about them against the dangers and confusions of a night attack. In cold weather the fire was kept alight till morning ; in summer the room would often become intolerably stuffy from the accumulated animal warmth of a score of snoring sleepers.

512 The Albanians were not given to early rising, for their
evening hours were late, and in the mountains the mornings
were cold. They would get up between eight and nine o'clock
and, by a generous convention, the younger guests were left
264 sleeping till last. The mountaineers knew not breakfast ; but
515 in many houses the host would bring a cup of coffee or of hot,
301 sweetened milk when he saw us wake. Ablutions were per-
functory, each man, or the host, pouring cold water from a
ewer over his fellow's hands, with which the latter seldom did
more than dab his eyes. Moustaches were *de rigueur*, though
by exception Abas Kupi was clean-shaven ; but only priests or
bandits grew beards. Shaving, however, was most often a
weekly affair and considered a sufficient occasion to warrant
the valedictory greeting of "*Meschnett*" — an equivalent of
000 "God bless you" — to the shaver. In these matters I con-
formed to the customs of the country, but Maclean and Smiley
insisted on adhering to the standards of cleanliness of their
distinguished cavalry regiments. Stripped to the waist and
with razors flashing, they washed daily and thoroughly, to
the great wonder of the mountaineers who crowded round to
514 watch. Albanian sanitary arrangements were primitive but
ingenious. The closet, which adjoined the guest room, pro-
jected, sometimes precariously, from the house over the
courtyard below. It consisted of a hole in the floor, often of
impracticably narrow circumference ; and, underneath it,
the thrifty Albanians were wont to keep their poultry, which
gobbled up a strange diet with evident relish.

[1] [i.e. eating — Analyst]

Women among the clans were but the slaves and chattels 562
of their men. In the mountains they went unveiled but almost all were prematurely aged by manual labour and child-bearing. Sometimes we saw one hurrying across a courtyard or peering up at us from the kitchen fire; otherwise they had no part in our lives.

Social distinctions among the guerillas were subtle and 554
changing; the chieftains and their sons were treated with respect but never with servility; and the bodyguards sometimes as poor relations but always as members of the same family. They ate and slept together, and, in so far as he could, the host provided alike for all. Luxuries in the mountains were inevitably scarce, but, if the choicest morsels went to the *Beys* and elders, the rest received their portion until the whole was finished. The Ghegs indeed regard hospitality as 574
a sacred duty enjoined upon the host, never as a favour conferred upon the guest. To give of his best was a point of honour, and a tribesman would kill his last ewe lamb, or even his milch goat, rather than fail to set meat before the meanest of his guests. In the days of slavery Albanians had been known to sell their wives or children to feast a stranger; and one story which I heard illustrates the extent of their honourable, if quixotic, liberality. In the repression which followed the rising of the Scutari clans early in the last century the bravest of the insurgent leaders, a Catholic chieftain, was captured and brought before the Turkish governor. The Pasha gave the order to cut off his head but, as the proud Albanian knelt to receive the fatal stroke, the Turk was moved by a dark and sudden curiosity:

"You are a brave man," he said. "Tell me, have you ever known a worse moment than this?"

The Albanian looked up and answered gravely: "Only once; when a stranger came to my house and I had not even bread to set before him."

For the sake of the answer, his life was spared.

We spent several days among the men of Mati, resting in 000
sunlit orchards, or cool, whitewashed rooms, or round their

000 hearths at night. We watched their unfamiliar ways, studied
668 their starkly realist opinions, and by a hundred different
[662] arguments preached war against the Germans. Abas Kupi meanwhile worked hard to strengthen his faction, rewarding friends, corrupting enemies, and gently menacing the undecided.
628 Above all he sought to impose a truce between the warring clans whose blood feuds threatened the unity of the Zogist cause. The *Hakmeria*, or blood feud, had its merits, for it was a great teacher of manners and of respect for the dignity of the individual.
[683] No Albanian indeed could strike another with impunity, and even schoolmasters had been known to pay with their lives for a hasty cuff in class. But the feuds took a heavy toll of life and suffering; and we met men from weak clans who had scarcely left their homes in twenty years for fear of neighbours with whom they were "in blood". Under the monarchy some attempt had been made to suppress the feuds; and they had begun to decline before the growing power of the Central Government. With the collapse, however, of Italian rule the mountaineers had returned to their ancient anarchy, and now blood feuds flourished on every side. As foreigners we stood in no danger from them, but they were none the less an important factor in our daily life. A guide would take us several hours out of our way to avoid crossing the territory of a clan with which he was "in blood"; chieftains would suddenly postpone a meeting, alarmed by rumours that their enemies were lying in wait; and sometimes at tribal gatherings we would see a man pass the coffee cup to his neighbour under his knee — the supreme mark of contempt for the man who had not even tried to avenge a wrong.

628 The persistence of the blood feuds presented Abas Kupi with a serious problem, for every time a clan was won to his cause their blood enemies would side automatically with his rivals. He therefore laboured patiently to reconcile the contending parties, and in accordance with the Law of Lek invited them to submit their feuds to his arbitration. There was, moreover, an ancient tradition that a general truce, or *besa*, might be proclaimed like the medieval "Truce of God" if a region was

in danger of foreign attack. To secure such a *besa* and so restore 628
the unity of Mati was now the Agha's foremost aim.

We were joined every now and then by groups of notables 662
who would accompany us on the march for two or three days. Among them came one, Hafuz Effendi, a shrunken, bird-like creature, who had been deputy of Mati under the Italians. Like many of the older Albanians Hafuz still wrote for preference in the Arabic script and for our benefit recited the opening *surahs* of the Koran. He had been on Essad Pasha's staff in the last war and since then, in the time-serving tradition of the Ottoman bureaucracy, had worked in turn for Fan Noli, Zog, and the Italians. During the occupation, indeed, he had twice betrayed Abas Kupi's hide-out to the Italians, and was even held responsible for the arrest of some of the guerillas. Now, however, that the Italians were gone, he piously proclaimed himself a democrat and had come to offer his services to Abas Kupi, in whom he discerned the paramount influence of the day. Such time-serving exceeded, even among the Albanians; and, despite his great age, he was mocked unmercifully by young and old. He was a guest, however, albeit self-invited, and while he was with us no one would have thought of harming him. Abas Kupi let him stay with us two days and then dismissed him to his house, but kindly; for it was now his policy to forget the past and to stretch out a hand to all who would support him.

Germanic names, such as Allemani and Walter, were found [551]
among the Mati clans, derived, so it was said, from Crusaders
who had settled in Albania on their way to the East. The
Walter clan had declared for Abas Kupi, but they were still 628
suspect to the Zogists; for they had long been blood enemies of the King. One of them indeed, named Bekir, had tried in 1924 to assassinate Zog in the Tirana Parliament. He had only succeeded in wounding him and, to escape capture, had then locked himself up in the Parliament lavatory. There he had reloaded and prepared to stand siege, singing patriotic songs to keep up his courage. None of the deputies had dared to break in the door, for they knew that Bekir was armed;

628 but after some parley he had been persuaded to surrender to Kotsuli, his party chief. Thanks to Kotsuli's efforts his sentence had been commuted to one of exile; and he had lived abroad, in Paris. Fifteen years later, when the Italians had driven Zog from the throne, Bekir had decided to return to Albania. There, business took him to Valona, and, late one night, staying in the chief hotel, he heard someone calling for help and beating against the wall. He went to investigate and found that some unfortunate man had locked himself up in the lavatory and could not get out. Bekir began to unpick the lock and, as he did so, a voice said from within:

"I am Kotsuli! I will reward your kindness."

"There is no need," replied Bekir, as he set free his former party chief, "for I am Walter. The debt was mine!"

We did not see Bekir, for his friendship with Kotsuli had led him into collaboration with the Germans, but the Walter clan received us well.

*669 Our progress through Mati was crowned by a grand gathering of the *Beys* in the stronghold of Dule, the chief of the powerful Allemani clan. Dule was a dark, inbred-looking man with sensitive, aquiline features wasted by consumption. For years he had pitted himself against Zog, but hatred of foreign rule had led him to join Abas Kupi; and he had astonished the tribes by his valour in the rising against the Italians. He was indeed a true *Caballero de la Triste Figura*, hiding a brave and generous nature beneath a decadent and ragged frame. A score or so of notables had assembled to meet us, and their bodyguards, camped about the keep, must have numbered close on a thousand men. Among them were Sul Kurti, a favourite of the King, known as the Lion of Mati, but grown old and heavy; Doda, the Italianised young *Bairaktar* of Kthelle, who was the leading Catholic among the Zogists and a cousin of the redoubtable Captain of Mirdita; and Yussuf Chelai, the dignified and courteous chief of the neighbouring clan. Yussuf Bey's presence was a pleasant surprise, for Allemanis and Chelais had long been "in blood"; and their reconciliation was a great triumph for Abas Kupi.

All of these men had taken part that autumn in the rising 669* against the Italians, and many had seen their homes burnt 727 and their livestock slaughtered in the accompanying reprisals. They had fought, however, with spirit, for they had been exasperated by Italian rule, and had believed that the hour of liberation, and of looting, was at hand. Now the situation was very different: they bore little hatred against the Germans; for the German yoke sat upon them lightly, and, in their remote regions, months might pass without their even seeing a German soldier. They knew indeed that an Allied victory was certain but, although they meant to play their part in the final destruction of the enemy, they had a wholesome respect for his ruthless ways. Only six months before they had risen in premature revolt; the price had been heavy; and they intended to make doubly sure of the fruits of victory before they again exposed their families and property to the risk of reprisals.

They received us with every mark of friendship and respect, but we saw that they would not easily be moved to fight. The fear of reprisals had become an obsession with them; and, when we urged them to take the field, they only pointed to the ruins of Burrel and to the gutted houses which in almost every village recalled the passage of an Italian army. Burrel [361] was the capital of Mati, built by King Zog as the model provincial city of Albania. It had once numbered some ten thousand inhabitants and had boasted solid public buildings, schools, a hospital, and modern houses such as had never been seen in these backward regions. In the rising of 1943 the clansmen of Mati had rushed the town and captured it, driving the Italian garrison back into their fortified barracks. The Italian command in Tirana had despatched reinforcements to the relief of the garrison; but Abas Kupi had lain in wait for them on the Qafa Stamm pass and for three days had disputed their crossing of the Skanderbeg range. Meanwhile the men of Mati had looted Burrel and decimated its defenders. In the end the Italians had reoccupied the city, and had set fire in revenge to every building in it. Nothing now remained but the gutted shell of its buildings, altogether deserted, with

*669 [723] the grass growing up between the paving-stones — a silent reminder to the people of the valley of the price of revolt.

We spent two days with the *Beys* of Mati; and the results of their discussions with us and with Abas Kupi were embodied in a formal resolution. The chiefs reaffirmed their loyalty to the Zogist movement, and proclaimed a general *besa*, or truce of blood feuds to last until the end of the war. They declared that they would resist any attempts by the Partisans to enter their territories, but rejected an invitation from the Central Government to send forces to join in a drive against them. They offered to provide our Mission with guards, guides, hospitality, and information, and appointed Abas Kupi to negotiate with us on their behalf. Finally, they agreed in principle to fight against the Germans, but left it to the Agha to settle with us the exact terms on which they should take the field.

These decisions were the best that we could hope for at this stage, and we therefore took leave of the assembled *Beys*, after warning them in appropriate speeches of the dangers of continued neutrality. We now marched north-west towards Burrel and were received at dusk into the ruined house of one of Abas Kupi's bodyguards. In the night, soon after we had retired, we were woken by the sound of a car. We jumped up hurriedly, and, pulling on our boots, sprang to arms outside, fearing a surprise attack. Our visitor, however, proved to be an Albanian officer, a spy of Abas Kupi's, who had come out to give us information of recent changes in German troop dispositions. He brought besides grave political news which was confirmed next morning in a message from Smiley. The Partisans had held a congress at Permeti, where resolutions had been passed calling for the formation of an L.N.C. provisional government, and demanding that Abas Kupi be declared an Enemy of the People. The clouds of civil war were already gathering in the South.

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000 We had descended into the Mati valley from the Ziber mountains and for two days had followed the left bank of the river,

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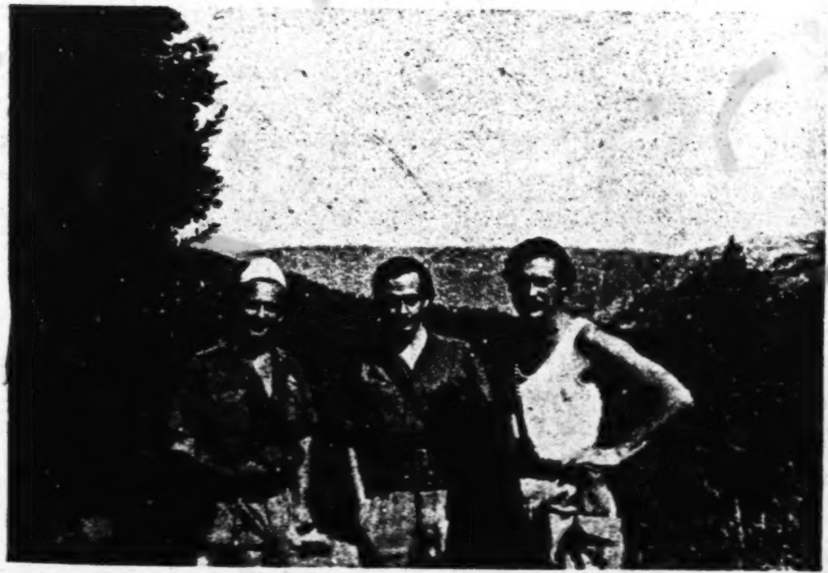
KAPLAN BEY CHELAI



"WE" — SMILEY, THE AUTHOR, MACLEAN

[-116a-]

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ABAS KUPI (SMELLING A ROSE) WITH TWO CHIEFS FROM THE TIRANA MOUNTAINS

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1/a [Cf. cat. 116, pp. 121-122 -- Analyst] THE ZOGIST HEADQUARTERS AT SHUPAL

[-116 b-]

000 marching south-eastwards towards its source. Then, by the gaping ruins of Pazaari-Urs, a model market village burnt by the Italians, we had crossed over to the right bank and returned north-westward, marching towards the sea. Now, ten days after we had come down into the valley, we forded the river once more, and began the ascent of the great Skanderbeg range which divides Mati from Kruya. It was only ten days since we had sung for joy to escape from the rawness of the mountains; but the full heat of summer was already upon us, and we were glad to climb again into their clearer air and shake the dust of the sultry valley from our feet.

We toiled uphill all day in the burning glare of the sun, and in the late afternoon reached the head of the pass whence the way ran down to Kruya. There Abas Kupi called a halt, and, while the men sat down and rolled cigarettes, we climbed a hundred feet or so to the summit of a projecting and rocky knoll. Four thousand feet below us lay the plain, with its broad acres, turgid inland lagoons, and the wrinkled promontory of Rodonit crawling out into the glinting waters of the Adriatic. Tirana and Durazzo were wrapped in the evening haze while Kruya was masked by the massive Kruya Mountain. This was a flat-topped cliff, rising nearly four thousand feet above the plain, and honeycombed with caves — the legendary abode of Said Saltiq, the immortal wizard of Albanian folk-lore. We stayed there nearly two hours, watching the colours fade while Abas Kupi told us of his early struggles. Then we climbed down to a broad meadow, where the guerillas wrestled with each other and played games until darkness made it safe to enter Shkrete, the hamlet where we were to spend the night.

186 We[1] left Shkrete next morning and proceeded all day at a leisurely pace towards the foot of Mount Kruya. In Mati Abas Kupi had everywhere been received with the respect and honour due to a great guerilla leader; in Kruya he was welcomed with devotion and enthusiasm, for now he was among his own people. He seemed to know each mountaineer we met and for each had a special word of greeting or enquiry. There could be no mistaking his popularity; and even in the

[1] [ie. the group of British liaison officers.-- Analyst]

186 poorest villages through which we passed the women would run out and kiss his hands or hold up their children to him.

000 Night overtook us in the trough between the range and Mount Kruya ; and an hour or so later we were received into a dilapidated house, built in a hollow some two hundred feet below the main Mati–Kruya road. There we were to meet representatives of the Zogist Central Committee next morning. Our position was exposed, and doubly so since our presence there was already known to the Committee in Tirana. Abas Kupi therefore posted sentries along the paths leading towards the house, and we slept that night with one eye open.

*669 The representatives of the Zogist Committee, Salih Hoja
648 Vuchitern and Teke Zelenitsa, arrived in the small hours of the morning. Both were badly shaken, for, by a strange irony, the car in which they had travelled from Tirana had been "strafed" on the road by an R.A.F. fighter 'plane. The pilot could hardly have been expected to know that they were on the business of the British Mission, but it was an unfortunate prelude to our talks. Salih Hoja was a Balkan politician of the old school, a blend of peasant guile and Byzantine diplomacy. He had been a powerful influence under King Zog ; but now his close-cropped hair was grown white with years, his voice was querulous, and his hand shook. Zelenitza was a younger man and had been an official in the palace. He was of an acid disposition, and, though more westernised than old Salih, lacked his courtesy and understanding. The two men had come out to press for political concessions, and we saw from the start that they would not agree to fight until some at least of their demands had been granted. Such an attitude was not indeed unnatural, for they were primarily politicians and knew that, once fighting started, it would be too late for them to intervene. Questions of policy would then tend to become subordinated to the immediate needs of war, and the control of the Zogist movement would pass out of their hands.

They began accordingly by repeating the principal demands which Abas Kupi had already made : the inclusion of Albania among the United Nations, the recognition of King Zog, self-determination for the Kossovo, and military support for the

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Zogist movement. Then in great detail, supported by a wealth of documentary evidence, they spoke to us of the Communist danger in the Balkans, and of the close connection between Moscow, Tito, and the L.N.C. Much of this we knew already, but they laboured the point as if we had not fully understood their meaning. So steeped were they, indeed, in their studies of the Eastern Question that they could not believe that any British Government would allow, let alone encourage, the spread of Russian influence to the Adriatic sea.

We answered, as on previous occasions, that if we had never ceased to recognise King Zog no problem would arise. We could not, however, recognise him now without causing serious concern to the Partisans, who were actively fighting the Germans. It was perhaps true that the Partisans reflected Russian rather than British interests; but, in our eyes, the Zogists could only maintain their claim to be our friends if they resumed the fight against the common enemy. Our alliance with Russia was the foundation of our policy, and we should therefore take no step which we could not openly justify before our Soviet allies.

When we had done, old Salih Hoja shook his head and answered:

"We know your victory is certain, but do you really need our sacrifices to justify your policy? When I was young it was enough that Great Britain had an interest at stake for her representatives to be sure that they were justified in defending it. We have already suffered once from your policies of appeasement. Believe me, the outlook for small nations will remain dark until you assert yourselves again."

We were troubled by the old man's answer, but our instructions were clear and we could not concede his demands. After some discussion, therefore, the two Zogist representatives rose to leave, promising to refer our opinions to their colleagues on the Central Committee and to send us an answer in writing.

Soon after the two men had gone a stranger was brought in by the bodyguards, bearing a letter for Abas Kupi. It was

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from Mustafa Kruya, and invited us to meet him and Mark Joni Markai for an exchange of views. Both men were still openly collaborating with the Germans and we decided that we could not take part in the talks ourselves. We agreed, however, that Abas Kupi should do so, for Mark was the son of the Captain of Mirdita and his attitude might decide the fate of Gheg resistance. The Mirdite clansmen were great warriors, and their hereditary Captain reputed worth more than five thousand rifles. Their region, moreover, marched with Mati, and, if we could bind together the Mirdites and Zogists, we should have a powerful force with which to attack the enemy and a wide expanse of territory into which we could withdraw from his wrath. Jon Marko Joni had long sided with the Axis, but we were not without hopes of obtaining his support : the tide of war was flowing in our favour, and it was believed that he had his price.

Abas Kupi left us, therefore, and that night met the two " collaborationists " in the Bektashi convent on the summit of Mount Kruya. It must have been a strange reunion, for Abas had not seen Mustafa since 1941, and, in the intervening years, each had sought to encompass the other's downfall and assassination. Neither, however, showed any sign of embarrassment, for, like wise men, they were guided by the injunction of Bias to " love as if you should hereafter hate and hate as if you should hereafter love ".

Mustafa and Mark knew that the Germans would soon be powerless to help them ; they could expect no mercy from the Communists ; and it was only by coming to terms with the Zogists that they might hope to " work their passage home ". At the same time, before they broke with the Germans, who still represented a positive, if wasting, asset, they wanted to make sure that Albania had not already been assigned to the Russian sphere of influence and that the Zogists were really strong enough to help them. They had come, therefore, to seek terms from Abas Kupi, and to learn how far he could count on British support. He never told us what answer he had given them, and, under the circumstances, we thought it more politic not to enquire.

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While Abas Kupi had been thus engaged, we had crossed the Kruya road with the main body of Zogists, now commanded by Petrit, and had withdrawn into the mountains to the south-east. There the Agha joined us next day and told us of his meeting. Then, leaving the bodyguard to rest, he led us to an isolated farm-house, where he had hidden his family in the care of a trusted friend. His wife was a large, motherly lady, of curiously Welsh appearance, with sharp features protruding from under a white veil. With her was their daughter, a vivacious girl of twelve, and their youngest son, Rustum, a wide-eyed, graceful boy, who, at the age of fourteen, had already killed his first Italian.

A family is a heavy liability in time of revolution, but, although a devoted father and husband, Abas Kupi never allowed his domestic cares to influence his political decisions. He had, besides, the satisfaction of finding in his eldest son, Petrit, a brave and useful lieutenant, who now acted increasingly as interpreter between us when important business was discussed. Petrit had been interned for two years in Italy at the beginning of the war and had acquired the patience and discretion which prison often teaches. Back in Albania, he had at once taken to the mountains and had fought for a year in the South in the ranks of the Partisans. In the winter of 1943, when the Agha had broken with Enver Hoja, Petrit had followed suit and had brought over to the Zogists a "shock cheta" of some thirty young Partisans. He was deeply respectful of his father and would never smoke nor drink in his presence. At the same time he held very independent views, curiously compounded of Albanian traditional values and the Marxist teachings of the Partisan commissars. The former, however, seemed to predominate; and he once told me that *The Count of Monte Cristo* was his favourite book, adding by way of explanation: "Quelle superbe vengeance!"

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Abas Kupi had not seen his family for three months, but he stayed with them only one night. Next day we pushed on to the village of Shupal, the seat of the permanent Zogist Headquarters. These were established in a cluster of houses on the summit of a steep-sided plateau, which rose out of the

*669 [361] valley between Mount Daiti and Mount Bastar. The position was naturally strong and enjoyed a commanding view of the surrounding country. Despite the rain a guard of honour had been turned out to receive us; and we were welcomed by Colonel Yahya Chachi, the Commandant of the Zogist Headquarters, and his staff. This was composed of three former majors of gendarmerie and a former major and a captain of infantry, who all greeted us with the customary Zogist salute, swinging the right arm smartly across the chest. They entertained us royally, providing us with knives and forks which [273] we had almost forgotten how to use, and plying us in quick succession with potent *raki* and good Italian wine. We drank a health to the monarchs of England and Albania — the greatest and the smallest kingdoms in the world — and then toasted each other with appropriate speeches and excessive frequency. This drinking of toasts was to be the cause of some mirth; for Colonel Yahya Chachi suffered from a pronounced squint, and every time he raised his glass to propose a health at the crowded table, two persons invariably replied, each arrested alike by the gaze of his penetrating but divergent eyes. The Zogist staff were friendly disposed, but strangers to Central Albania, and, it seemed to us, demoralised by prolonged inactivity. Their real function indeed was to impress the tribes with Abas Kupi's power, and, if it came to fighting, to man the movement's mortars and heavy machine-guns.

When we had lunched we were taken out in a body to inspect the *cheta* responsible for the defence of the Headquarters.† It consisted of a hundred and fifty ragged men and boys, variously armed with rifles of German, Italian, Austrian, Serbian and Turkish pattern. They were drawn up in two ranks, each of which was dressed with as much precision as the undulations of the ground and the individualism of the guerillas would allow. We passed them rapidly in inspection and were then led to a low eminence where the staff officers assumed appropriately martial attitudes while Colonel Yahya harangued
000 the troops. Maclean was invited to reply; and when he had finished speaking the men placed their rifles between their knees and signified their approbation by loud and prolonged

†[i.e. at Shupal, seat of permanent Zogist Headquarters -- Analyst]

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clapping. It was, I recalled, under rather similar circumstances that the Duke of Wellington once exclaimed: "I hope these gallant fellows will frighten the enemy; they certainly frighten me!"

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Afterwards we watched Zogist teams at their mortar and machine-gun training, and were then shown over the depleted stock of mortars and automatic weapons which the Zogists still retained from the revolt against the Italians.

Abas Kupi took no part in these unreal parades, but watched them from a distance, chatting with the local peasants and smelling a rose which one of them had given him. He joined us, however, when we began to inspect his stock of weapons and gently reminded us that his poverty in arms was in part the result of British policy. In the previous autumn an Italian division had surrendered to him and had volunteered to fight for the Allies. He had little use for them as soldiers and had planned to disarm them and distribute their weapons to his mountaineers. The British Mission, however, with its natural preference for regular soldiers as against guerillas, had insisted on letting the Italians keep their arms. All had gone well at first, but, with the approach of winter, the Italians had lost heart and had marched back into Tirana with all their equipment.

The written reply of the Central Committee reached us while we were still in Shupal. It proved to be a twenty-page memorandum, recapitulating in execrable French all the demands which Salih Hoja had made to us by the Kruya road,[1] and which we had then flatly rejected. On the vital issues of fighting the Germans and of coming to terms with the L.N.C. there was no word. This seemed to us intolerable prevarication and we decided to demand an immediate explanation from Abas Kupi. We signified, therefore, through our interpreter, that we wished to speak with him; and he led us out from the crowded headquarters into a field where carpets had been spread. Our irritation had by this time somewhat subsided, but Maclean made a good show of anger and protested vehemently against the useless repetition of inadmissible arguments.

[1] [Cf. pp. 118-119.--Analyst]

000 "We have risked our lives," he concluded, "to find out how we can help your movement; and now you bring us this nonsense as a reply."

There was a pause; and then with a deprecating smile Abas Kupi explained that the members of the Committee had really prepared the memorandum for their first meeting with us. The typist had failed to finish it in time, but now that the fair copy was ready they had felt that it would be a pity not to send it to us.

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The tension between us was dispelled by this ridiculous admission, and the conversation now took a more serious turn. Rather to our surprise, Abas Kupi invited us to arrange for him to meet the Partisan leaders as soon as possible. His declared object was to achieve a common front with them against the Germans, and he laid down as his only condition that a British officer should be present throughout their discussions. This he regarded as an essential safeguard so that we might judge for ourselves which party was responsible, should the negotiations break down. To bring Partisans and Zogists together round a table would be the first step towards a reconciliation; and we might then hope to bring pressure to bear on both sides to prevent them from flying apart. We therefore welcomed the proposal and promised to transmit it at once to our Headquarters, and, through them, to our colleagues with the L.N.C.

The Agha then briefly referred to his earlier demands for the recognition of the King, the inclusion of Albania among the United Nations, and the self-determination of the frontier provinces. These were issues of high policy to which his Central Committee attached the greatest importance; and, as a mere soldier, he would be very reluctant to go against their advice. He would, however, do so without hesitation on orders from King Zog. The King was in London, and Abas Kupi, therefore, proposed that we should refer our differences to him and ask for his private instructions.

"Let the King send a message through your Mission," he said, "and if he tells me to fight with my bare hands, I will."

This request seemed to us an inspired alternative to the

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impracticable demands for public assurances. We had indeed resolutely set ourselves against all political concessions, but to transmit a private message would involve no commitment. It seemed only natural that a monarchist leader should wish to consult his king before taking the field; and we could see no good reason why we should not help him to do so. We felt certain besides that the King's instructions would be favourable to our policy; and once armed with a mandate from him for war Abas Kupi would be free to disregard the objections of his Central Committee.

We undertook, therefore, to transmit this second proposal also to our Headquarters, and prepared to return to our base on Mount Bastar to despatch the necessary telegrams. Several days must pass before we could expect an answer and we planned meanwhile to visit Riddle's mission in the valley of the Black Drin. Abas Kupi for his part had work in Shiyak, the province beyond Durazzo, and it was agreed that we should meet again in the first days of June.

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WE rode into camp at dusk on the 21st of May, and, turning our riding ponies out to grass, joined Smiley and Hare where they reclined upon the hillside, meditating over a bottle of Marsala. The Italian orderlies presently set food before us, replaced the empty bottles with new, and wrapped blankets round our shoulders, for the mountain air was cool. Thus we prolonged the summer night exchanging news and discussing plans. In our absence Hare had been down into the plain to take soundings of opinion in Tirana and to find means of passing subversive propaganda to the enemy troops. He had picked up much interesting information and had made some useful contacts, but it would be some time before his propaganda campaign could produce results. Smiley meanwhile had reconnoitred the nearest German positions and had looked after half a dozen U.S. airmen who had baled out near Tirana and had been rescued by the Zogists. He had also received

000 two " supply drops " from Italy, consisting of medical supplies, tinned rations, overcoats, sleeping-bags, and, most precious of all, our mail, with copies of the weekly newspapers and back numbers of *The Times*. No military stores had been dropped, since the Zogists were not yet fighting, but there were enough uniforms and rifles to equip our bodyguards, as well as a selection of pistols and submachine-guns which might serve as gifts to the guerilla leaders.

I slept late next morning and was aroused by Baptista, one of the Italian orderlies, lustily singing *Sole Mio* just outside my tent. The sun was indeed shining, and the cheerful fellow, seeing me wake, ran off towards the cookhouse and presently returned with a steaming plate of bacon and eggs — an unaccustomed luxury, for it was nearly three weeks since I had tasted breakfast. An hour or so later I climbed to the crest of the ridge above the camp and there sat down on a ledge in the shade of a clump of pines. It was now time to reflect on the lessons of our journey with Abas Kupi and to knit them together into a report for our Headquarters.

*669 Our progress through Mati and Kruya had lasted eighteen
665 days ; in that time we had met Zogists of every condition, and had conferred at length with the local chieftains, officers, and politicians who were the leaders of the movement. Our first problem had been to assess the fighting strength of the Zogists : a baffling task, for guerilla armies are born of the changing moods of a people, and not even Abas Kupi knew for certain how many men would rally to his call. By dint, however, of reckoning up the rifle power of the separate clans which supported him, and by checking and cross-checking estimates of the forces engaged in the fighting of the previous autumn, we concluded that Abas Kupi could raise at least five thousand rifles at short call. Such a force might increase two- or threefold if fortune and the Allies favoured the Monarchist cause ; but, though success would quickly swell the numbers of the Zogists, they would not long endure defeat, losses, or reprisals. Rifles there were enough, for every male over the age of fifteen went armed, but ammunition was short, and the supply of mortars and automatic weapons negligible.

Starting from this estimate of their military potential we 669*
had next to decide whether the Zogists could again be made 665
to fight. Abas Kupi, we believed, wanted war; for he needed British backing and was prepared to pay the price. Till now, however, he had been held back by the danger of a Partisan attack, the opposition of his political advisors, and the fear of reprisals and poverty of weapons which paralysed the clans. Arms we could supply once fighting had begun, and money enough to compensate for reprisals; but to reconcile Zogists and Partisans, and to convert the Zogist Committee to our way of thinking were thornier problems. Abas Kupi knew that to remain neutral as between Germans and Partisans was to court isolation and to risk falling between two stools. Originally, when the Axis Powers had been supreme, he had worked with the Communists against the Italians; later, as the Axis star declined, he had hoped to use the Germans to destroy the Communists. We had now convinced him that such a course would fatally compromise his relations with us; and, since in the last analysis the fate of the Monarchist cause would depend on our support, he was once more prepared to join hands with the Communists against the Germans. Whether they would prove equally amenable seemed uncertain, but we had at least brought the Agha to agree to negotiations; and it was now up to our Headquarters and to our colleagues with the L.N.C. to do their part. Their task would doubtless be easier if Abas Kupi attacked the Germans; but here we entered on a vicious circle, for it was to a large extent his fear of the Partisans which inhibited him from taking the field.

But the chief obstacle to action, and the root cause of the 669*
defeatism of Abas Kupi's political advisers, was their mistrust 648
of British policy. They suspected that we had already assigned Albania to the Russian zone of influence, and regarded such a prospect not as liberation but as a change of masters. They had therefore demanded political assurances from us, as a test of our intentions; and, by refusing to commit ourselves, we had only seemed to confirm their worst suspicions. We had feared for a time that our negotiations must end in deadlock, but Abas Kupi's alternative request for private instructions from

* 669 King Zog now seemed to offer an escape from the impasse.
648 Zog was in London, the heart of Allied councils, and thus surely in the best position to decide where his honour and interests lay. If he would order Abas Kupi to take the field, then there would be an end of political wrangling and we could look forward to fighting in like measure as we sent arms. Instructions from Zog thus appeared as the cure to all our ills, but it was vital that they should be sent quickly. The clouds of civil war were already gathering in the South, and unless the Zogists took the field before they broke, the whole situation would be lost. It was essential, moreover, that our request should not be refused; for, if we again met Abas Kupi with empty hands, he must conclude either that the King was opposed to war, or that, so far from extending recognition to him, the British Government was not even prepared to enlist his informal co-operation. A decision so fundamental to our policy and so urgently required seemed to justify a direct communication with the Foreign Secretary. This concluded with the words: "There is grave danger that without this measure of encouragement Abas Kupi will go the way of General Mihailovitch".

000 I spent the whole day on the ridge drafting my report, and towards evening returned to the camp with a sense, seldom before experienced, that I had understood what I had seen and expressed what I had understood. That night we discussed my draft among ourselves, and, when each had put forward his amendments, drew up the final text. Throughout the time of our mission we made a practice of thus debating among ourselves the messages which one of us had drafted. These discussions were often long and sometimes heated, but I can recall no single instance of a telegram which was despatched without first being unanimously agreed. In this way we gradually developed a common approach to our problems and a common doctrine of revolt. This was to prove a great strength; for it meant that, even when separated from one another we could still rely that all our actions would be informed by the same purpose and interpretation of events.

Our work at base was finished with the preparation of our report to Headquarters. Riddle awaited us in Dibra; and, although it was past midnight when we had done with writing, it was settled that Maclean and I should leave next day on our reconnaissance of the Black Drin valley. The sky was clear when we retired to sleep, but just before dawn a gale blew up from the south, and with the day a deluge of rain and hail broke on our camp. In less than an hour our sleeping and eating quarters were turned into a sea of mud; mules and men slithered on the hillside; our makeshift tents collapsed; our kit was soaked; and for a time it even seemed impossible to light a fire and brew a hot drink. About midday the storm at last subsided into a steady downpour, and, leaving Smiley and Hare paddling disconsolately in the mud, we moved down through the clouds towards the Mati valley. With us went John Hibberdine, on his way to join Neel and our mission in the extreme north of Albania. 000

The march was irksome, for the wind blew cold and the paths were slippery. The day turned fine, however, as we crossed the valley, and we saw the sun set just before we reached the house of our friend Yussuf Bey Chelai, whose hospitality we sought for the night. Although nominally a Zogist, Yussuf Bey was known to be in touch with the Partisans, not indeed from ideological conviction, but because his former blood enemies, the Allemanis, were already deeply committed to Abas Kupi's cause. That evening he spoke of the growing danger of civil war and said that it would not long be possible for a man in his position to avoid taking sides. His concern was genuine; for, unlike most Albanians, Yussuf Bey preferred the arts and pleasures of peace to the stratagems of war, and spent his time in reading and in entertaining his friends. There was, indeed, an almost Persian delicacy about his hospitality; and he called me next morning with a glass of hot, sweetened milk and a rose! 574

We left Yussuf Bey's house early and climbed northwards over the shoulder of the great Mount Allemani, hoping to reach the neighbourhood of Peshkopi that night. The path led up a sheltered gully in the side of the mountain, and at

574 the head of it we found an old man with his two sons tending a flock of sheep. It was midday, and so we broke our journey [609] to accept their profferred hospitality of sheep's milk and pancakes dipped in honey. The old shepherd was not the least surprised to learn that we were British officers, but became very excited when he discovered that we had just come from Cairo. It then appeared that he had fought in the Ottoman army in the Tripolitanian war and had escaped to Egypt after the defeat of the Turks. There he had become a bodyguard to King Fuad and had served that Prince for fifteen years, both before and after his accession to the throne. He was overjoyed at the chance of practising his few words of Arabic and of reminiscing about the Egyptian leaders of his time; and it was only with difficulty that we restrained him from killing a sheep in our honour. Presently we rose to leave, and the old man shouldered his rifle to speed us on our way. The Albanian code of hospitality requires that the host should accompany his guests for an hour on their road to protect them against attack. In practice the full formality is usually abridged, but our shepherd friend was so genuinely anxious to express his goodwill that he guided us for the next seven hours of the march down to the main road leading to Dibra. There he bade us farewell in Arabic, and with great dignity declined our tactful offers of remuneration. By good fortune, however, I still had with me a box of Egyptian cigarettes and a few Egyptian piastres, which he gladly accepted as a souvenir of our meeting.

000 We had seen two cars on the road in the early afternoon, but there was now no sign of traffic. We therefore marched boldly along it, rejoicing in its even surface and in its breadth, which allowed us to walk two or more abreast and so to talk in comfort. Just before the light failed we came to a place where the road curved sharply eastwards along the face of a cliff. There, for the first time, we caught sight of the Black Drin, winding through the plain of Dibra. Two hours later, after a march which had lasted altogether twelve hours, we reached the house of Aziz Dino Hoja, a granite keep four stories high, situated only a few yards from the river. There Riddle was waiting.

The Dibrans, like the men of Mati, lived an existence half pastoral, half agricultural, in which the tribalism of the mountains merged with the feudalism of the plains. They were a grim and calculating breed of men, a border people waging a ceaseless war with their Slav neighbours from Macedonia. The town of Dibra had been a rich centre of trade under the Ottoman Empire, but now it was shrunk to little more than a quarter of its former size. The fall of the Turk had perhaps interrupted the peaceful progress of commerce, but the struggle of the Powers for the control of Macedonia afforded the Dibran chiefs splendid opportunities for mercenary enterprise. For close on a century the rival nations had provided their clients among them with arms and subsidies; and so practised had the chiefs become in the technique of power politics that at any time the balance of power between the leading Dibran families reflected the exact relation between their foreign patrons. The ends which the Dibrans served were purely mercenary, but nevertheless they had learnt from experience the fundamental truth that freedom can only be preserved and wealth attained by the exercise of power. Moreover they understood, and this was perhaps the surest proof of their political genius, that it is not given even to the keenest brains to know with certainty where their interests lie. Each clan accordingly sought to reinsure against the imponderable factors in a situation by systematically placing a relative in each of the different political camps. 101 [181]

Dibra was said to hold five thousand rifles; but so divided were the Dibrans by local blood feuds and foreign intrigues that it seemed doubtful whether any clan could command the direct allegiance of more than five hundred men. The most powerful man in the region was Fikri Dine, once a henchman of King Zog. Fikri had led the rising of the Dibran clans in 1943: then he had routed the Italians and driven them out of Dibra city; but now, for fear of the Communists, he supported the Tirana Government. He came from a small clan and drew his power, not from the number of his rifles, but from his personal ascendancy over the bigger chiefs who had control of man-power. Like the chiefs of Mati they were torn by blood 669*

*669 feuds; but Fikri had persuaded them to a general truce; and Dibra remained loyal to the Central Government, even supplying troops to fight against the Partisans. We did not then meet Fikri, for he was in Tirana, but wherever we went in Dibra we saw signs of his powerful influence.

Aziz Dino Hoja, our[1] first Dibran host, belonged to a small clan settled on the west bank of the Drin. His father had played a leading part in the politics of the region and had been famed as an architect of alliances and conspiracies. Since his death, a few years earlier, the fortunes of the family had declined; for his brain had been their chief capital, and his two sons, Aziz and Reshad, had been too young at the time to carry on his work. Reshad, the elder, had gone to study in Italy and there had wasted the family substance. When all was spent he had returned to Dibra, but his roots in the clan had withered and he had resigned the chieftainship to his younger brother. We found Reshad an effete but friendly day-dreamer, for ever gazing at the relics of his Italian life; the photographs, ashtrays, and cocktail-shaker, with which he had incongruously decorated the guest-room of their medieval keep. He had lost all interest in local affairs, but out of politeness attended most of our discussions while we stayed in the house. He seldom spoke, however, and I doubt whether he even listened.

His brother, Aziz, was a dark, handsome youth of seventeen, ambitious to revive the prestige of the clan. He had already gathered around him the young men of some of the lesser families of Dibra and was in touch with both Zogists and Partisans. He could not have been worth more than a hundred rifles, but he told us at our first meeting that he would gladly fight the Germans as soon as some stronger leader, such as Abas Kupi, should give the lead.

Aziz inclined to the Allies, but his uncle, Ramadan, a big, bony fellow, smug and uncouth, recruited gendarmes for the Tirana Government from among his following. Uncle and nephew thus seemed to be rivals, and, in our ignorance of the subtleties of Dibran politics, we sought to strengthen Aziz's

[1] [i.e. British liaison group in spring of 1944 -- Analyst]

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MORTAR TRAINING AT ZOGIST HEADQUARTERS

(*Left to Right*) Major Murad Basha (with cigarette), Abas Kupi, the author, Colonel Yahya Chachi

[-132a-]

ABAS KUPI (ON THE RIGHT) DICTATING TO A SECRETARY

(The author's pony appears in the background)

SAID BEY KRYEZIU

MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR

(From a photograph taken in Exile in 1947)

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position by publicly rebuking Ramadan for his collaboration with the enemy. Our intervention, however, was resented; for, though there was no love lost between the two men, each regarded the other's policy as a reinsurance against his own miscalculations. Both indeed regarded the unity and prestige of the clan as their first interest, and one which was served, rather than threatened, by the simultaneous pursuit of their apparently contradictory policies.

We stayed only twenty-four hours with Aziz Dino Hoja; and next evening, as soon as it was dark, Maclean and Riddle set out across the Drin to keep a rendezvous with Ramadan Kalloshi, one of the strongest chiefs in Dibra. I stayed behind, however, to meet Aqif Llesh, who had sent word that he would come that night. Aqif was a stubborn old opponent of King Zog, and had spent fifteen years of exile in Yugoslavia, where I had once met him in 1940. After the German offensive in the Balkans, Aqif had taken to the mountains, where he had remained until the collapse of Italy. He had then sought to take advantage of the general amnesty, but his homecoming had been short-lived, for Fikri Dine was his blood enemy and had burnt down his house and carried off his flocks. Aqif's connections with Yugoslavia had naturally inclined him to the L.N.C., and his nephew, Haji, had already received an important command from Enver Hoja. To get even with Fikri Dine he had now openly declared for the Partisans, and was, besides, believed to be in touch with Tito's men in Macedonia.

The grizzled old warrior reached the house about ten o'clock with a bodyguard of thirty men, some of whom were left to stand sentry outside the gate. He was dressed in blue breeches and a leather coat and cap, and the stubble of his beard grew white on his kindly, weather-beaten face. He had marched all day and must have been tired, but refused both *raki* and coffee. In his time he had been a heavy drinker, but now he affected the puritanism of the Partisans. He talked in voluble and rapid Serb, and, after a detailed explanation of his experiences and opinions, spoke of the importance of persuading the Gheg chiefs to take up arms again against the [273]

*669 Germans. I had been waiting for this opening and asked :

" Do you hold a reconciliation between the Partisans and Nationalist leaders like Abas Kupi to be possible ? "

" Yes, if they will fight the Germans as we do."

" Can they be persuaded to fight again ? "

[643] " I[1] fear there is only one way. If Zog will come to the radio and tell them to fight, then they will. You know that I have worked against him all my life, but I tell you now that he is the only man who can raise the Ghegs and so prevent civil war."

We finished talking towards midnight, when I took leave of Aqif and of my hosts ; for, unless I crossed the Drin before daybreak, I should be delayed on the west bank until the following night. The crossing was guarded by a gendarmerie post ; and the river was in spate. My obol, however, won the favour of the aged ferryman, who punted us over on a raft right under the nose of the sleeping gendarmes. A guide from
579 Aziz Dino Hoja led the way beyond the river and I was followed by Kolaver, my personal bodyguard. This Kolaver was a lean and wolfish fellow, and a source of constant anxiety to my companions. He had started life as a brigand, but in the time of King Zog had turned gendarme, not indeed from any change of heart, but because he appreciated that, under a strong government, only the police can rob with impunity. When the Italians had invaded Albania he had returned to the mountains, judging that under their laxer rule it would be more profitable as well as more patriotic to pursue his calling after the manner of his youth. In those troubled times, however, brigandage proved a hard life ; and a solid if unusual interest in the King's restoration had led him to join Abas Kupi. He had attached himself to me during our progress through Mati, and at an early stage had been caught stealing in our camp. Abas Kupi had threatened him with death, but I had interceded on his behalf, because he was a gay rogue, and had saved him from his deserts by accepting responsibility for his future conduct. Thereafter he protected my belongings as if they had been the Holy Grail, and attended to my campaigning comforts with almost motherly devotion. Other people's

[1] [Aqif Llesh, a life-time opponent of Zog, cf. cat. nb. p. 133 -- Analyst]

property, however, he continued to regard as fair game; but, though he sometimes boasted to me of his plundering expeditions, he was careful for my sake to honour the eleventh commandment. 579

Our guide seemed only casually acquainted with the district, and was besides terrified by rumours that a German patrol had been seen by the river earlier that night. Kolaver, however, encouraged him to find the path by alternately promising glittering rewards and jabbing him in the ribs with my submachine-gun. At last, after wandering for nearly four hours through rolling woods and meadows, we reached the house of Ramadan Kalloshi, where Maclean and Riddle were asleep. 000

Murad, the head of the powerful Kalloshi clan, had followed Zog into exile and lay in Istanbul, stricken with epilepsy. In his absence the leadership of the family was divided between his son, Ramadan, and his half brother, Myftar. In accordance with Dibran practice these two had proceeded to a division of labour: Ramadan pursued a pro-Allied policy, keeping in touch with the British missions, the Zogists, and the L.N.C., while Myftar sided with the Axis and led the government forces against the Macedonian Partisans. Ramadan was a dark young man, with the smooth, round features, delicate eyebrows, and moustache of a Moghul miniature. His nature was sombre and brooding, but he spoke with breath-taking frankness. Next morning in the course of conversation Riddle enquired after the health of his relatives and asked: 669*

"How is your cousin, Selim?" 669+ 761

"The dead one?" Ramadan queried.

"Forgive me," Riddle said, "I didn't know that he had died."

"Well, he's not dead yet," came the reply, "but the doctors say that there is little hope, so we call him 'the Dead One' and are dividing up his property!"

His words sounded blatantly cynical, but they were not meant to shock, and it struck me at the time that they were symbolic of the attitude of the Albanians towards the problems of the war. In their eyes the Germans, like Selim, were "dead", because past hope of recovery; and the approaching

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annihilation of both left no more room for hatred of the one than for love of the other. Like Ramadan, they were now solely concerned with staking out their claims to the succession, and saw no object in seeking to hasten or retard by a few days a process which was already moving swiftly to its appointed end. In such a mental climate all appeals to sentiment must fall on deaf ears ; but Ramadan was quick to see the strength of our argument that the Gheg chiefs must attack the Germans if they wanted to receive Allied support. He pleaded indeed that his clan was too weak to begin such a struggle alone, but undertook to join in if Abas Kupi, or Muharrem Bairaktar, should give a lead. He also put forward the interesting suggestion that we should invite the Gheg leaders to a congress to discuss the terms on which they would agree to fight.

" They'll give each other courage," he said, " and with so many competing for Allied support you'll get them all cheaper ! "

We marched northwards from our meeting with Ramadan Kalloshi, following the low range of hills above the Drin until we came to Sohodoll, the stronghold of the Elezis. Elezis and Kalloshis had long contended for supremacy in Dibra, and a blood feud had raged between them since the days of the Turkish occupation. The Kalloshis were supporters of King Zog ; the Elezis, Republicans ; but, for the time being, they observed a truce arranged by Fikri Dine. Tsen, the chief of the Elezis, had fought against the Italians in 1943, and had severely mauled a company of Germans who had sought to arrest Peter Kemp when a guest in his house. Fear of the Communists, however, had led him to make peace with Tirana ; and he had gone there now to receive the salaried title of a Colonel in the government forces and a grant, it was said, of four thousand napoleons. His eldest son, Jelal, was with him, living at government expense in the *Daiti*, Tirana's one luxury hotel. His brother, Ersat, defended the Partisan interest in north Dibra ; his nephew, Dali, commanded the first L.N.C. division ; and two sons, Islam and Gani, were in touch, on their father's behalf, with Abas Kupi, *669 Muharrem Bairaktar, and the British Missions. The clan thus had a foot in every camp, and, by a masterly display of "trimming", survived both the war and the revolution.

000 The fortress of the Elezis had been partly destroyed by the Germans, who had set fire to it to punish Tsen for harbouring a British officer. The fortunate intervention of a thunderstorm had saved much of the building from the flames; but there had been no time for repairs, and it was now altogether deserted. We dismounted there, none the less, and despatched messengers to Sohodoll, who presently returned with Tsen's two sons, Gani and Islam. Both spoke English well, having studied at the American college in Tirana, and reminded us irresistibly of Mr. Can and Mr. Can't in the famous Eno's advertisement. Islam was gay and debonair, clad in a new tweed suit of a pinkish colour. Gani was dour, glum, and down-at-heel.

"Make yourselves at home!" said Islam cheerfully, as we sat down among the ruins of their house. A light rain fell on us through the holes in the roof, and the wind whistled through the open doorways.

"What a summer!" grumbled Gani.

"It may be good for the crops," suggested Maclean.

"No, they will be very bad," Gani replied in sepulchral tones.

"As bad as last year?" I hazarded.

"Much worse," he answered, drawing down the corners of his mouth.

Abandoning agriculture, Maclean then enquired after the health of the Elezi family.

"Thank you," Gani answered, "none of them are dead yet."

669* 648 After these depressing preliminaries Maclean delivered his set speech, explaining the purpose of our mission, urging the Ghegs to fight the Germans, and stressing the dangers of their continued neutrality. Both brothers declared that they were willing to fight but argued, like Ramadan Kalloshi, that they were not strong enough to give a lead. They showed us, however, that they were seriously concerned by our policy of supporting the Partisans.

"As you know," said Islam, "there are three parties in Albania: the agents of Germany, the agents of Russia, and

*669 648 the agents of England. That is quite natural, but what none of us can understand is why the agents of Russia are paid in English gold."

"Perhaps it's what they mean by lease-lend," Gani muttered.

000 We ate our midday meal with Gani and Islam, and in the afternoon called on Tsen's brother, Ersat, to learn something of the Dibran Partisans. He treated us to a vigorous tirade against most of the Gheg leaders, including his own brother; but his words were not matched by his deeds, for his following was small. The Gheg Partisans were still too few to undertake any actions on their own, and were waiting for Enver Hoja to launch his northern expedition.

Towards evening we abandoned the Dibran lowlands and climbed into the rugged glens of Liuma, where the snow was not yet wholly melted. Our way led up a stony gully which ended abruptly in a long slope of shifting scree. It was steep, and the going treacherous; and we dismounted, leading our ponies for the last few hundred feet. Heavy thunderclouds were billowing up at the head of the gully, and on the crest stood a square, stone barrack, grim and windswept—the lair of Osman Lita, the Black Douglas of the Liuman march. Dark, cruel, and grasping, Osman was growing old, not with the dignity which years can bring, but with a thickening of the body and wandering of the mind. He received us indeed with traditional hospitality, but I slept little that night, for it was a house of fear.

Next day we conferred with his son, Sherif, who was now the effective leader of the tribe; a lean and hungry man with cold, light eyes, who had worked for the Italians in Montenegro, spying on Mihailovitch. He listened impassively while I explained our policy, but when he understood that he could hope for neither arms nor subsidies until he fought the Germans he shook his head and answered bitterly:

"Words without gold are to us like chaff without corn."

From Osman Lita's house we climbed for some two thousand feet to a broad, moorland plateau. To the west the ground ran down steeply to a tributary torrent of the Drin, 000 while to the east the snow-capped summit of Mount Korab rose near ten thousand feet into the sky. We pushed on for close on five hours, through woods and over moors, and soon after nightfall reached the lonely house which was Riddle's base. There we found Tony Neel, who had come south to meet us with three deserters from the enemy — a German corporal and two Turkoman soldiers in German uniform.

Maclean had served in Abyssinia with Wingate and had been greatly impressed by his doctrine of the " striking force ". Wingate had held that lone British liaison officers, armed only with the weapons of persuasion, were in a weak position to influence the strategy of foreign guerilla leaders. If, on the other hand, they disposed of a disciplined body of men, or " striking force ", under their own direct command, they might be able to impose their will upon their guerilla allies. The guerillas might be reluctant to fight, but the " striking force " could always attack the enemy alone ; and Wingate believed that by their example they would often draw the guerilla leaders into operations which they could never have persuaded them to undertake on their own. In applying his theory to the Abyssinian campaign Wingate had trained small " striking forces " of native troops in the Sudan, and had marched them into Abyssinia under the command of British officers. By virtue of their superior discipline, these forerunners of the Burma Chindits had soon become the nuclei around which the guerillas had gathered, and had thus served as the instruments through which British strategy was imposed on the plans of the Abyssinians.

The hesitations of the Zogist leaders made us long for such 669*
a force,* and, at an early stage, we had decided to try and recruit 648
one from the Central Asian troops which the Germans employed for garrison duties. These were for the most part deserters, or prisoners, from the Red Army, who had been reorganised under the command of German officers. There was reason to believe that they had only joined the Germans reluctantly, or for purely mercenary reasons ; and we thought it likely that they would welcome a chance to change sides again and

*[i.e. as described in paragraph above --Analyst]

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" work their passage home ". We reckoned, moreover, that they would prove good soldiers for our purpose, for they were descended from the hordes of Tamerlane, and their warlike instincts had been fortified by a thorough training in the Russian and German armies. We had accordingly instructed all missions to seek contact with these Turkomans and stir them up to kill their officers and desert to the guerillas. Hare was already engaged on plans for their subversion in Central Albania, but the first successful approach had been made by Tony Neel.

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Neel had paid a surprise call on the Bairaktar of Krasniqi, a Gheg chieftain who maintained independent relations with both British and Germans, and had found him in conference with a German corporal named Brandt. Brandt had been wearing a Turkoman flash on his uniform ; and Neel had at once set to work to induce him to desert with his men. Brandt had shown interest, but they had found it difficult to come to an understanding, for, in the absence of a suitable interpreter, they could only communicate in broken Italian and sign language. Brandt had agreed, however, to come and talk matters over with us, and had brought with him two sample Turkomans — Tajiks [1] from the high Pamirs, and both fine-looking men.

I spent much of the night talking to Brandt and trying to decide whether the man was genuine in his wish to change sides and what might be his motives. He claimed to be a German Balt, whose family had lived in Russia before the revolution and had then retired to Esthonia. By profession he was an entomologist, and had travelled in Persia and Afghanistan before the war in search of butterflies. He had fled to Germany at the time of the Russian occupation of the Baltic States, and had been conscripted into the German army. There he had attracted attention by his knowledge of Turki and Persian, and had been employed as interpreter to the German Mission sent to Afghanistan to work with the Fakir of

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[1] The Tajiks are, of course, of Iranian and not Turki stock. The German army, however, classified all Central Asian volunteers as " Turkoman ", and, for the sake of convenience, I have held throughout to this classification.

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Ipi. The Mission had failed, and, in 1941, Brandt had returned to Germany, to be posted as an interpreter-N.C.O. to one of the Turkoman units. He now realised that the Germans had lost the war and offered to help us bring the Turkomans over to the guerillas, in the hopes that we would then help him to start a new life in the Middle East.

The profession of entomologist is notoriously linked with that of espionage ; and I could not help thinking that Brandt was more than just an interpreter-corporal. At the same time, the frank avowal of his mission to the Fakir of Ipi was disarming ; and there was something indefinable about the man which suggested the White Russian adventurer. He might well have worked for the German Secret Service, but it was none the less quite possible that he now wanted to leave the German ship before it sank. If Brandt was genuine he might bring over as many as two hundred Turkomans ; and, since we needed them urgently, we decided to take the risk. Neel was therefore instructed to work out plans with Brandt, but to keep his eyes skinned for any hint of foul play.

The sequel surpassed our worst fears and brightest hopes. Far from being a corporal, Brandt was really a Lieut.-Colonel in the German Secret Service and had been sent to organise the capture of the British officers in Albania. He had heard of our efforts to subvert the Central Asian troops and had devised a stratagem for our undoing on the model of the Trojan horse. He would stage a desertion to the guerillas with a body of trusted Turkomans ; he would then insinuate himself into our confidence, and at the first opportunity would call up his men and place us under arrest. His accidental meeting with Neel had been carefully prearranged ; and his talk with me had left him sanguine of success. He therefore returned to Prizren from Riddle's base, and, after selecting his Turkoman accomplices, joined Neel in Nikai. At first Neel took careful precautions to guard against foul play, but he was soon convinced of Brandt's good faith, and even entrusted the Turkomans with the task of guarding his base. The stage was now set for the German coup ; but meanwhile the Allies had landed in France, and Brandt began to think that it might be

000 wiser to play a deserter's part to the end. Twice he went to Scutari, ostensibly to obtain information for Neel, but really to learn the latest news of the fighting in the west from his German colleagues. For several days he continued undecided, but meanwhile the Turkomans grew impatient of the primitive guerilla life which they shared with the British Mission. They saw no difficulty in capturing the British officers, and were hungry, besides, for the rewards they had been promised when they should bring them back as prisoners. Early one morning, therefore, they formed up to Brandt and pressed for permission to seize Neel and his staff at once. Brandt tried to put them off, but they demanded an immediate decision; and he now made up his mind to go over to the British. He therefore went and roused Neel, who was still sleeping, to explain the situation to him.

"It was very early, and a beastly morning," Neel afterwards told me, "and there was old Fred telling me that he was a Lieut.-Colonel in the Hun Secret Service. It was a bit of a shock, don't you know."

Neel recovered, however, from his surprise, and after drinking a cup of tea the two went out together to meet the Turkomans. A brief harangue, seconded by a liberal donative, secured their allegiance; and for the next four months they did stout service in the Allied cause.

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622 RIDDLE's reports and our talks with the Dibran chiefs had convinced us that we must enlist the support of Muharrem Bairaktar, and we therefore decided to push on northwards to meet him. Muharrem was the lord of Liuma, the wild territory to the east of the Black Drin, and was reputed worth more than a thousand rifles. His influence, moreover, extended beyond the borders of his region, both into Dibra, as we had seen for ourselves, and into the lands north of the White Drin. The word *Bairaktar* means "standard bearer" in Albanian, but by a natural association of ideas it has become the usual title

of a tribal chief among the Ghegs. Muharrem's whole clan, 669* however, was surnamed *Bairaktari*, from an incident in the 622 eleventh century, when the Liuman chief of the day had been elected general of a confederation of northern tribes. In more recent times the fortunes of the clan had declined, and it was only under Muharrem's chieftainship that it had returned to its ancient supremacy in the valley of the Black Drin.

Muharrem had first come into prominence in the revolt of 1924, when he had raised Liuma for Zog and had outflanked the government forces concentrated in Dibra. As a reward he had been made one of the quadrumvirate, with Fikri Dine, Prenk Previsi, and Jemal Herri, to whom Zog had entrusted the pacification of North Albania. He had received the command of the Kukes military district, and had skilfully exploited this position to consolidate his personal influence in Liuma and extend it to the surrounding regions. But once the monarchy had been solidly established, the King had regarded the mission of the quadrumvirs as fulfilled and had determined to reduce the power which they already threatened to abuse. Accordingly, in 1933, he had appointed Muharrem as his A.D.C., an empty promotion which deprived him of his military command and kept him in Tirana, away from the seat of his influence. Muharrem was not the man to submit quietly to such gilded servitude, and, fired by jealousy and ambition, had plotted with the Captain of Mirdita and the Yugoslav Government to overthrow the King. The conspiracy, however, had been betrayed, and, warned of his impending arrest, Muharrem had fled to Liuma to raise the standard of revolt. He could scarcely have expected to defeat the government forces alone, but, with the support of the Captain of Mirdita and the intervention of the Yugoslavs, he still hoped to obtain honourable terms from Zog. Marko Joni, however, had lost heart, and, abandoned by his ally, Muharrem had crossed into Yugoslavia to begin the cycle of exile which was to lead him in turn to Belgrade, Vienna, and Paris.

Exile is perhaps the hardest test which a political leader can 000 face; for it deprives him of those correctives of custom and

000 public opinion which at home insensibly guide and restrain his actions. He becomes a general without an army, beholden to foreign governments, and, living in a mental climate where ideas tend naturally to the abstract and extreme because no longer rooted in the daily needs of political supporters. Men of wide interests and philosophic bent may, like Louis Napoleon or Lenin, improve the enforced leisure of exile ; but Muharrem Bairaktar was a primitive highland chief, and in the crowded capitals of Europe was deprived of his bearings. His natural wariness was turned into persecution mania by the petty café intrigues of political *émigrés* ; and the interest which he aroused by his picturesque ways swelled his ambition until he saw himself not merely as ruler of Albania but as the man predestined to unite the Balkan peoples.

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His exile had fortunately been short, and, in 1939, he had taken advantage of the general amnesty to return to Albania. He had declined, however, to take any part in public life and had retired to his stronghold in Liuma, refusing all contact with the occupation authorities. During the summer of 1940 he had corresponded with Gani Kryeziu in Belgrade, and, in April 1941, had mobilised to support the attempted revolt of the United Front. After its failure he had remained inactive, except for some communication with General Mihailovitch, but, with the collapse of Italy, he had suddenly raised his clan and captured Kukes. Kukes commands the junction of the Black with the White Drin and the vital bridges on the road from Prizren to Scutari. The Germans had therefore sent considerable forces to recover the town ; and Muharrem, realising that resistance was hopeless, had agreed to retire without fighting on condition that no German troops should enter Liuma. The region had thus never been occupied by the Germans; and Muharrem had afforded shelter through the winter to Riddle's Mission, as well as to isolated groups of Partisans. The Germans must have known of these things through their spies, but they kept to their agreement. They were well aware, indeed, of the difficulties of tracking down lone British officers in the tangled mountains of Liuma, and with the small forces at their disposal hesitated to provoke Muhar-

rem's open hostility. Their aim was to keep Muharrem 669*
neutral ; ours was now to bring him back into the war. 622

We left Riddle's base on the 29th of May, and, just before 000
sunset, climbed on to the range that forms the eastern wall of the Drin gorges. The powerful river lay two thousand feet below us, narrowly compressed between smooth black cliffs, through which its deep and swirling waters ran a vivid blue, stained by the copper deposits in the rock. Beyond the jagged peaks of Liuma towered into the sky. and, with the approach of darkness, the scene became awe-inspiring, almost Wagnerian. We[1] followed a narrow path scratched in the face of the cliff 764
above the river, and now and then passed little stone cairns beside it. Each marked a grave and guarded the bones of some traveller who had fallen to his blood enemy, lying in wait. The dead were buried where they had been killed ; for the path was too steep and the way too long to bring their bodies home for funeral.

Night overtook us on the march, but we pressed on until 574
we came to a cluster of buildings, surrounded by a high 609
crenellated wall. This was Muharrem's[2] castle. Our guards called out and beat upon the gates, and, after an exchange of shouts with shadowy figures on the battlements, we were admitted to a wide courtyard. In front of us was a stone building, founded on a rock, and on the steps leading up to it stood the lord of Liuma, with a bodyguard beside him holding a torch of blazing pinewood. He bowed to us, introducing himself as Bairaktar, and led the way indoors to a room furnished with tables and upholstered chairs, the first I had seen in Albania. There we sat down for the customary exchange of greetings ; and presently coffee was brought.

Muharrem was of stocky build, dressed in a plain grey uniform with a lumberjack's leather cap on his head. He looked not unlike Kaiser Wilhelm, with the same iron grey hair and moustache, loose mouth, and small piercing eyes. When at rest there was an almost abnormal concentration in his gaze, and sometimes a sly smile would cross his face, as if prompted by his inward thoughts. He was reserved of speech

[1] [British liaison officers -- Analyst]

[2] [Muharrem Bairaktar, chieftain of Liuma clan -- Analyst]

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574 and his delivery rapid and jerky. In his years of exile he had
609 acquired a working knowledge of French and German; and, though the limitations of his vocabulary were only matched by his Olympian disregard of syntax, we were delighted to avoid the boredom of badly interpreted conversation. The evening meal was served towards midnight in a separate dining-room, and was distinguished by excellent Turkish dishes and a coarse red wine, pressed from the Liuman vineyards. At table we were waited on by Muharrem's two sons, who stood guard behind our chairs while we ate. Both were grown men, but treated their father with almost servile respect.

*669 Next morning Muharrem laid before us an ambitious plan for raising the Gheg tribes against the Germans. This was set out in the form of a memorandum addressed to the British Government, and contained an interesting analysis of the Balkan situation, as well as detailed proposals for the organisation and strategy of a resistance movement. Appended to it was an estimate of the military supplies that would be needed to equip and maintain the tribes. Muharrem's general argument was that the useful military operations of the L.N.C. were becoming increasingly subordinated to their questionable political aims. The interests, therefore, of Albania and of Great Britain required the promotion of an Albanian Nationalist movement, which would attack the Germans with greater zeal than was shown by the L.N.C., and would seek to take over political power in the hour of victory. He, Muharrem, was prepared to undertake the leadership of such a movement if we would provide him with the necessary arms and sinews of war.

We insensibly eroded this bold and visionary scheme until, after two hours' discussion, Muharrem agreed to our more modest proposal. This was that he should organise and lead the resistance movement in the valley of the Black Drin. He declined, however, to accept our thesis that no supplies could be sent to him before he had attacked the enemy, and remarked with some plausibility:

" I have fought against the Italians, and I intend to fight against the Germans. If you will send me arms I will fight when and where you tell me; if not, then I will choose my own 669* time and place for action."

Our differences thus reduced to the question of military supplies, we sounded Muharrem as to his relations with the other Gheg leaders. In this he showed himself accommodating and offered of his own accord to leave the issue of the monarchy in abeyance in the interest of co-operation with Abas Kupi. He then proposed that we should set out together next day to take counsel with Gani Kryeziu, whose influence was growing daily in the lands beyond the Drin. We fell in at once with this suggestion; for we were already beginning to think in terms of a concerted revolt of the Ghegs under the leadership of Abas Kupi, Muharrem Bairaktar, and Gani Kryeziu. Muharrem therefore despatched messengers to Gani to advise him of our plans and to ask that he should appoint a suitable place for our meeting.

For the rest of the day we enjoyed the comforts of the 000 house, or paced the courtyard, drawing out Muharrem on the subject of his past conspiracies and discussing the prospects of the revolt among ourselves. That evening we were joined by Riddle's deputy, Tony Simcox, a gunner who had served with one of the Chinese divisions in the retreat from Burma. Simcox was firm of purpose, blunt of speech, and deeply conscious of the responsibilities of a British representative in a strange land. He liked and understood the mountaineers, and, since these things are mutual, received their friendship and in time their trust.

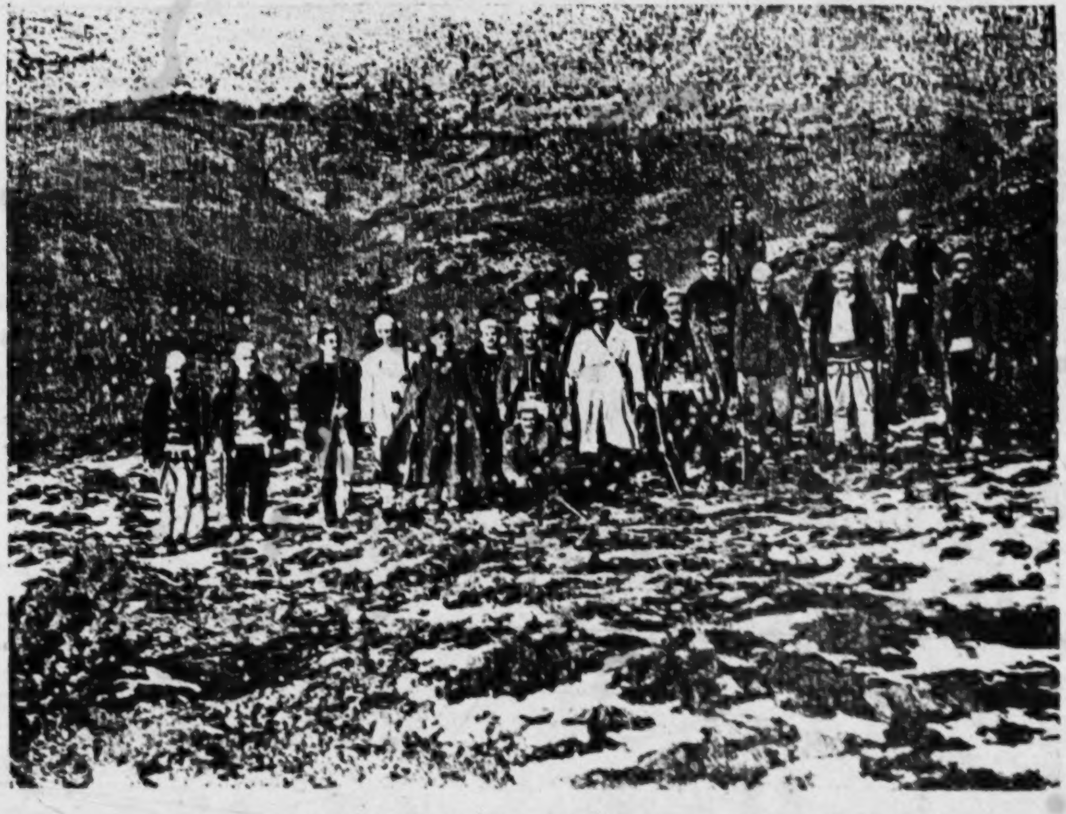
We were aroused next morning at first light, and soon after sunrise rode out through the castle gate, still deep in the shadow of the eastern mountains. Muharrem was wrapt in a dark-blue cloak and sat a milk-white but frisky mule, caparisoned with a *Kilim* carpet of red and green design. Some forty well-armed tribesmen marched in our train; big, bony fellows, dressed in [291] brown jackets and close-fitting white breeches, braided with black — the customary dress which had now altogether replaced the traditional fustanella still seen in Liuma when Muharrem was a boy. Our way led south along the cliff path for perhaps an hour and then turned sharply north-east, following the

000 course of a torrent which broke through the eastern wall of the gorge. We went slowly, for the ascent was steep, and Muharrem inclined to frequent rests. "*Kadal, kadal*" — "Slowly, slowly" — was his oft-repeated maxim. Towards nine in the morning we at last emerged into the sunshine and followed a more gradual path to an isolated farmstead. There we stopped for the heat of the day and ate our midday meal of roast lamb and cheese in a shaded orchard, pink and white with blossom.

133 We* pressed on in the afternoon, and, climbing up wooded slopes too steep to ride, came out on to the grassy uplands of Teya, in parts still deep in snow. Teya is a plateau over eight thousand feet high, with stretches so broad and smooth that they might almost have made a landing-ground for aircraft. The day was cloudless and we turned aside from the path to scale a pyramid-shaped knoll for the view. There all Albania was spread out at our feet, convulsed into a chaos of broken valleys and intersecting ranges. To the north the wavy, jagged chain of the Albanian Alps rose to its climax in the tooth-like, snow-covered peak of Shkelzen; westwards the rolling highlands of Mirdita stretched towards the sea; to the east Korab towered immediately above us, shutting out the prospect of the Vardar valley; and in the south the snowy summit of Tomori hung above the haze. It took us nearly two hours to cross the plateau, and, climbing down five thousand feet beyond, we came towards dusk to Topoyan, a straggling village on the banks of the river Liuma from which the region draws its name.

Next day, the 1st of June, we splashed across the Liuma and rode northwards along the crest of the range that rises from its eastern bank. The sun was scorching, and in the full noontide heat we reached the head of the gorge, whence the river broadens out across the plain of Kukes. From there we saw the junction of the Black with the White Drin, and, with the help of our glasses, studied the houses and bridges of Kukes with the white ribbon of road that runs through the town to
000 Scutari. A mountain village was perched precariously above the gorge, and there we ate our midday meal in the company

*[British liaison officers, Spring of 1944--Analyst]



MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR (IN CLOAK) WITH HIS BODYGUARD

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7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

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LIUMAN CHIEFTAINS

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MAIN GATEWAY OF MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR'S CASTLE, WITH SENTRY ON THE PARAPET

000 of a Yugoslav doctor, a Bosnian. He had sought refuge in Albania from the many-sided civil war which perplexed his country, and, for two years now, had lived in this primitive community, earning his keep by caring for the health of the mountaineers. In the afternoon we made our way down gentle slopes towards the plain, and soon after dark reached the village of Jan, half an hour from the banks of the White Drin. Men and horses were tired, and, since there were no villages on the northern bank of the river, Muharrem decided that we should sleep in Jan and attempt the crossing on the following night.

*669 Next day, while we rested in the house, a courier came from Riddle's base, bringing us a sheaf of telegrams from Headquarters. These contained no reply to our own proposals but told us that Philip Leake, the head of the Albanian section, had " dropped " to the L.N.C. and hoped to meet us later in the neighbourhood of Tirana. Leake's first messages from Partisan Headquarters reported that Enver Hoja was adamant in his refusal to work with the Zogists, and presaged an early outbreak of civil war.

000 We left Jan at dusk and half an hour later reached the ferry moorings which were within forty yards of the Prizren–Scutari road. Muharrem posted two light machine-guns to protect the crossing against an attack ; and the men lay down in the long grass while waiting to embark. The ferry consisted of a broad punt attached to an iron hawser slung across the river. It could carry ten men at a time and took a quarter of an hour to cross and return. The first ferry load had just pushed off from the south bank when a German convoy thundered past, escorted by two armoured cars. Fortunately they failed to see us, for, with our backs to the river, it would have been an uncomfortable fight. Apart from this incident, however, the crossing went smoothly ; and in less than an hour the whole party was assembled on the northern bank. We climbed thence up a steep, wooded gully, little more than a cleft in the face of the mountains, and, after an hour's march, reached a miserable village where the headman and his clan turned out to meet us. There we stopped for the evening meal,

000 and while it was made ready were entertained by two old men who sang to us the strident epics of the highlands, accompanied on the one-stringed *guzla*. We climbed on after we had eaten, but the path now wound ever steeper through the woods and we lost our way several times in the moonless night. Climbing was hot work, but we lit fires wherever we halted, for at that height the night air was still bitterly cold. At last, just before dawn, we crawled over the crest of the range and came out on to a broad and undulating stretch of moorland. We continued marching till the sun had warmed the morning and then dropped asleep in the bracken, where we lay till the afternoon.

622 We resumed our journey in the evening and an hour after dark reached the tall stone keep of Mehmet Ali, the *Bairaktar* of Hass. There our strength was revived with lashings of a
[574] potent *raki*; and, while the meal was made ready, our hunger was stayed by *mese* of eggs and cheese. Mehmet Ali was an old-fashioned tribal chief, a cheery fellow, and an excellent host. He was reputed the most prudent man in all Albania and had persistently refused to disclose the name of the friend who had sheltered him in the Balkan wars thirty years before.

"You never know," he would say, "when I may need to hide with his family again!"

000 Towards midnight the sudden barking of the watch-dogs warned us that strangers were at the gate. Mehmet Ali went out to meet them and presently returned, ushering two men into the room. The first of these was Said Kryeziu, a sub-machine-gun slung across his shoulder and two hand-grenades dangling from his belt. Prison had left its mark on him, and his face was thin and drawn. He shook hands gravely with the assembled company and was just murmuring some formal greeting to me when a flash of recognition crossed his face and we fell into each other's arms. He had received no word that I was in Albania, and now this sudden reunion in the mountains seemed to both of us like a good omen. Perhaps we were at last to fulfil the work we had begun together in Belgrade.

669 Said brought us the best news we had heard since landing in Albania. His brother, Gani, had just fought an engagement with the Germans, the third in recent weeks. At last we had found a Gheg leader who was at war with the enemy. Nor 669 was this all ; for, although he declined to join their movement, Gani was on excellent terms with the Partisans.

The Kryeziu brothers had been living as outlaws in the Jakova mountains since their escape from Italy. They had mobilised a small force, and, some months before, had begun stirring up disaffection among the neighbouring tribes and in the Kossovo. Their activities had presently alarmed the Germans, who had sent out a punitive expedition to suppress them. Guided by a blood enemy of the Kryezius, the Germans had surrounded Gani in his hide-out, and, but for the providential approach of night, must have destroyed him. As it was, he had shot his way out into the darkness, killing seven of the enemy for the loss of two of his own men. Since then Gani had twice attacked German patrols sent into the region and had driven them off with losses.

Besides Gani's men there were also a few Partisans in the Jakova mountains belonging to the so-called "Kosmet" (Kossovo Metohia) group and in close touch with Marshal Tito. They had often pressed Gani to join their movement, but he had always refused, knowing that it was completely Communist controlled. At the same time he regarded them as allies in the common struggle against the Germans and had used his influence with the mountaineers to obtain protection and hospitality for them. This had been no easy task, for Kossovar opinion regarded the Partisans with unconcealed hostility as agents of Slavdom.

Said Kryeziu's companion was a certain Lazar Fundo, a 665 Vlach from Korcha, who worked as Gani's chief propagandist and political adviser. Fundo was a man of fine and sensitive features, then in his forties, and combined great personal gentleness with an utterly ruthless intellect ; a peculiar blend often to be observed among those who have received their early training in the ranks of the Communist Party or the militant orders of the Roman Church. Fundo had indeed been a Communist, and had served the Party for nearly fifteen years, both at the Comintern headquarters in Moscow and on missions in Europe and Asia. But the prestige which

665 he enjoyed among the Party leaders had only served to excite the jealousy of Seifullah Maleshova, then the only other Albanian Communist. National character proved stronger than ideology ; and Maleshova had pursued his rival with all the implacable determination of a mountain blood feud. For years he had bided his time, but in 1938, during the Moscow trials, had denounced Fundo as a Right-Wing Deviationist and fellow conspirator of Bukharin. Fundo had been in Paris at the time, working among the Balkan exiles, and had obeyed the summons to return to Moscow with a clear conscience. There he had been tried before a Party Court, but the charges against him had been dismissed, thanks to the intervention of George Dimitroff, who was his personal friend. A few weeks later his passport had been returned to him and he had been ordered to go back to Paris to complete his mission. But meanwhile he had undergone an unpredictable change of heart. He had arrived in Moscow an orthodox Stalinist, prepared to justify the "purges" which were then at their height : he left the Soviet capital convinced that thousands of honest Communists were being done to death solely to make way for the unlimited dictatorship of Stalin and his faction. He had himself been spared, thanks to the favour he enjoyed in high places ; but the experience had converted him to those very deviationary tendencies of which he had falsely been accused. Back in Paris he openly advocated the reintroduction of democracy into the constitution of the Party and began to consort with the Trotskyist and Bukharinist exiles. His lapse from orthodoxy was soon known to Maleshova ; he was again denounced, and again invited to return to Moscow. This time, however, he prudently declined.

Disillusioned with Communism, Fundo had turned to Social-Democracy, and in 1938 had gone back to Albania, planning to found an Albanian Socialist Party. The Italians, however, had arrested him in the summer of 1939, and had sent him to the concentration camp at Ventotteno. There he had later been joined by the Kryeziu brothers, and the three had soon become fast friends. They had escaped together with the collapse of Italy, and Fundo had followed Gani back to Jakova as his political adviser. There he had prepared some brilliant leaflets for distribution in the Kossovo and had been a great influence for good in the Kryeziu's camp. To us he seemed a valuable ally; for in a dark and confused world he looked to the British Commonwealth as the least defective of human institutions. 665

We had several talks with Fundo and he told us something of his experiences as an official of the Comintern. Among other duties he had once been responsible for briefing Tito, then one of the senior European agents of the Communist Party. He told us that in those days Tito was considered in Moscow as one of their bravest and most loyal workers, endowed with great strength of character and the gift of leadership. His intellectual qualities, however, were not rated so high, and whenever he was sent on a difficult mission the Comintern provided him with one or more companions to guide his energies and make sure that he followed the "party line". Unfortunately for our Missions in Yugoslavia Fundo was no longer in a position to tell us who were now the brains behind the Marshal. 000

Gani had appointed the 5th of June for our meeting, and we therefore set out from Vlahn, accompanied by Muharrem Bairaktar, Said, Fundo, and Mehmet Ali, our host. We travelled by night, for our bodyguard was now nearly a hundred strong and we wanted to keep our movements secret from the Germans, at least until our talks with Gani were over. Our way led through fields and woods across a broad plain, watered by tributary streams of the Drin. The level going seemed strange after long weeks of climbing in the mountains; and, in the night, the stunted trees wreathed in waves of ground mist gave me the impression of riding along the bed of the sea. Just before the dawn it grew very cold; then, as the sun rose, we left the plain and followed a path into the forest of Bitutch. There we presently came upon a small detachment of Gani's men, posted to guard the approaches to his camp. They recognised Said, and brought us to the clearing where Gani was encamped. We embraced each other, glad that our paths 669*

*669 should have crossed again. He led us to the shade of some trees where carpets from a neighbouring house had been spread for our conference. The hardships of internment had aged him, but they had also given him strength, and there was now a more determined look in his eyes than I had ever seen in Belgrade.

[622] With Gani were representatives of the Kosmet Partisans and a number of Moslem chiefs, including Salimani, the *Bairaktar* of Krasniqi. Salimani stood over six feet tall, a fierce old warrior with strong, regular features and thick, silver [291] hair and moustache. He was dressed in close-fitting, white breeches and a dark-blue jacket, with a white skull-cap on his head and a scarlet sash around his waist. His gun was silver-handled, a silver lanyard hung from his neck, and the tobacco pouch on his belt was of filigree worked by the Scutari silversmiths. He was over eighty years old, but bore himself erect, and his voice was still clear and strong. His clan had long been in blood with the Kryezius; for Gani's brother, Tsena, had pursued Bairam Tsuri, a rival northern chief, into Krasniqi and there had driven him to suicide. But now the two were reconciled, for that winter Salimani's only son had been killed fighting against the Germans in the ranks of the Partisans. The new feud obscured the old, and, in the face of a common foe, the two clans had laid aside their ancient enmity.

We sat down cross-legged under the trees, and, with Said acting as interpreter, began our conversations with Gani. Meanwhile the other chiefs rested around us in a semicircle, listening. Our first instinct had been to bid them withdraw, that we might talk in privacy, but Said had dissuaded us, arguing that nothing would impress the chiefs so much as to see us reach agreement in public. Gani therefore told us of his recent fights with the Germans and stressed that only lack of arms and ammunition had prevented him from taking the offensive on a wider scale. Then, with a gesture of invitation he said:

"I have come to receive your orders."

We answered along familiar lines that the time had now come for an all-out effort against the Germans; at the same time we stressed that we could only send him arms in proportion to the scale of the actions which he undertook. In reply he spoke of the advantages of building up a reserve of weapons before taking the offensive, but, seeing that our instructions on this point were binding, said:

"Since first we worked together in 1940 I† have regarded [648] myself as a soldier of the Allies. You represent the Allied Commander-in-Chief, and I must obey your orders. I have told you my objections, now I will do my duty; in ten days from now we will attack the Germans wherever we can. Give me such help as you think right and send me a British officer, trained in sabotage. I promise you that he will have work enough!"

Such complete and unconditional agreement surpassed our wildest hopes and we at once announced that we would attach a British officer to Gani's forces. Our choice fell naturally on Simcox, for he was trained in sabotage and already had experience of conditions north of the Drin. Maclean accordingly sent him that same afternoon to Riddle's base to collect such arms and explosives as he could, and then to join Gani with them. Gani welcomed our decision and in return invited us to take his brother, Said, with us to help in our negotiations with Abas Kupi.

"Let him be the pledge of my good faith," he said. He then addressed the assembled chiefs, explaining the terms of our agreement, and adding: "I put my trust in Great Britain, but my efforts alone will not be enough. If Albania is to be saved you must all play your part."

They shook their heads, a disconcerting gesture which, among the Albanians, signifies approval. We saw, however, that they would take no risks until they knew that our alliance with Gani had borne fruit. Each agreed in principle to fight, but, as old Salimani put it:

"First you must send us arms and then the other thing." And here he rubbed his thumb against his forefinger and rolled his eyes.

† [Gani Kryeziu, famous Gheg chieftain -- Analyst]

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000 OUR meeting with Gani Kryeziu had taken us farther afield than we had at first intended ; it was already the 6th of June, and we were due back at base next day for talks with Abas Kupi. To return by the way we had come would take us more than a week ; but the only short cut — and this would take at least four days — lay through the wild highlands of Mirdita. This was the most primitive region in all Albania [622] and firmly in the grip of Jon Marko Joni, the Captain of the Mirdites and the ally of the Germans. Gani and Muharrem begged us not to attempt the journey, and, when they saw that our minds were made up, offered to put a force of a hundred men at our disposal, so that, if necessary, we might fight our way through any opposition. To feed such a force, however, might well prove impossible, especially if the clansmen were hostile. We therefore determined to put our trust in speed rather than strength, hoping to be in Mati before Marko Joni learned that we had crossed Mirdita.

We rested, therefore, through the morning and afternoon of the 6th June and, bidding Gani farewell, set out at sunset with Said and Muharrem Bairaktar. The nights are short at this season, but we planned to cross both the Great Drin and the [133] Scutari–Kukes road before dawn. The river was too deep and swift to ford, and there was no alternative but to cross by the ferry. This was guarded, however, by a gendarmerie post under a new commandant, whose attitude was still unknown to the local chieftains. We reached the crossing about midnight and Muharrem deployed his men so as to surround the gendarmes. He then sent for the commandant and exhorted him as a patriotic Albanian to help our forces over the Drin. Intimidated by our array, and encouraged by a handful of gold, that officer soon discovered a vehement sympathy for the Allied cause ; the necessary orders were issued to the ferryman, and within half an hour our forces were across the river.

An hour beyond the Drin our paths divided ; Muharrem turned eastwards on his way back to Liuma ; and the rest of us, now reduced to fifteen men, continued southwards, still 000 hoping to reach the Kukes–Scutari road before it was light. The men were tired, however, for we had been marching seven hours; and the sun had already risen when we crossed the [137] motor road into the great beech forests of Mirdita. As we learned only later, a German patrol caught sight of us just as we crossed the road. Had they pursued us we must have been overtaken; for once in Mirdita we dropped to a leisurely climbing pace and indulged ourselves in frequent halts. Instead they sought to head us off by taking a short cut; but the forests of Mirdita are dark and trackless, and we passed like ships in the night.

We soon lost our way in these forests, and were forced to climb some five thousand feet to the rocky summit of Mount Rones to take our bearings. We sat there for a time, but hunger discouraged us from resting, and we struck a south-westerly course downhill into the valley of the Lesser Fani. Our ponies were too lame and galled to ride; and we had been marching seventeen hours when, towards three o'clock, we reached the house of Gyok Bairaktar. Gyok was a Mirdite chieftain and many years before had been an ally of Muharrem. Since those days, however, he had fallen on evil times, and we found him living in the utmost poverty and squalor. His home [562] was a wooden hut, divided into two rooms, one of which housed his goats and womenfolk, while the other was kept for his guests, himself, and his sons.

"That's a funny sort of *Bairaktar*," said Shaqir, our interpreter, "he hasn't even got any trousers."

Poor Gyok indeed was dressed in nothing but a dirty white shirt and long cotton drawers, having thriftily put away his one pair of breeches for the summer. He gave us a light meal of eggs and milk; for besides his milch goats he had no flocks or cattle, and offered us a pinkish *raki* which I could scarcely stomach, even after the fatigues of the march. But despite his miserable circumstances, which in Mirdita were the rule rather than the exception, Gyok was a loyal liege of Marko Joni. He was frankly disturbed to hear that we were British officers, and, when we sought to learn his political opinions, answered sharply:

000 "Where the Captain leads, I will follow."

We stretched out on his mud floor and slept a couple of hours, but then pressed on, not wishing to stay there long enough for news of our presence to reach Marko Joni. Our short rest had stiffened rather than refreshed us, but that night, at about ten o'clock, after a march of altogether twenty-two hours, we crawled into a low stone fortress near the village of Konai. There we were hospitably entertained by a cousin of Marko Joni, who inclined, however, to the Zogist cause. The
622 company that evening included Res Lufi, a chieftain from the borders of Mati and Mirdita, who was renowned for the success
[628] with which he waged his blood feuds. Next day we were to pass a well where, some years earlier, he had drowned six of his blood enemies whom he had taken in their sleep.

000 From Konai the path to Mati led through Oroshi, the seat of the Abbot of Mirdita, and one of Marko Joni's strongholds. We judged it more prudent, therefore, to make a slight detour and set out in the morning to climb the Mali Shengjit, or Mount Saint John, a broad, wooded massif which separates the regions of Mirdita and Lura. The day was fine, but we made slow progress; for the going was rough and the men nearing the limit of endurance. In the late afternoon, however, we descended into Lura and stopped by the side of the path to smoke and chat with a farmer returning from the market. He spoke for some time of local politics and then added as an afterthought:

"They said in the market that Rome has fallen and that the English have landed in France!"

Our bodyguards greeted the news with wild shouts and fired their rifles into the air; the old man was embraced by all and sundry; and we left him still sitting by the roadside, bewildered that anyone should be excited by news of these distant events.

We pushed on next morning through the barren gorges of Matsukull and in the evening reached Sul Kurti's house on the fringes of the Mati valley. We found old Sul sitting on a carpet in his orchard enjoying the last hours of daylight with one of his sons. This young man had come from Tirana only the day before, and from him we learnt details of the battle in France. That night Sul gave us a banquet in honour of the landing and even produced a bottle of champagne, a treasured gift from King Zog. The assembled company rejoiced that British troops were once again in France, but they shuddered at the news of Russian victories ; and fear of the Partisans darkened their celebrations, like a shadow.

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Next day, the fourth since we had passed the Drin, we set out across the Mati valley. The grass was already scorched by the sun, and the paths were ankle-deep in dust. The white mulberry trees, however, were laden with fruit, and from these we ate our fill. By Albanian custom a traveller may pick as much fruit from any tree as he can eat beneath it, though to take more than a hatful away is accounted theft. Towards evening we stopped by the banks of the Mati to bathe and wash in its icy waters. Then, two hours after dark, we reached the village of Klos, where we had our first solid meal of the day.

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In Klos a courier brought us a letter from Smiley with news that Abas Kupi was at our base with a group of Zogist leaders. Smiley also wrote that Philip Leake had been killed in a German air attack on the Partisan headquarters. Leake had been a friend, and had understood the Albanian problem ; his death at this critical moment was a bitter blow.

Next morning, the 11th of June, we climbed slowly up the southern wall of the Mati valley on the last lap of our journey. We crossed the range and, following the stony course of the Ziber torrent, came in sight of our base an hour after midday. As we entered the clearing Smiley and Hare came out to meet us with Abas Kupi and a great following of chiefs and bodyguards. Abas and Said embraced several times ; and we were brought back to our camp, pressed about by the welcoming throng of guerillas.

Thus, in less than five days, we had marched from the Jakova mountains to the borders of Tirana, climbing over ten hours each day and, on one occasion, twenty-two out of the twenty-four. The country we had covered was of the wildest and steepest in Europe, and we were tired and strained. The sun shone, however, and our spirits were buoyed up by the news of the British landing in France. All of us felt that the hour of decision was at hand.

IV

CROSS-ROADS

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> It is an entertaining pursuit to speculate upon the subtleties of legal theory or to trace from age to age the transmission of the perennial maxims of political wisdom; it is more instructive to discover, in any time and under any system of government, the identity of the agents and ministers of power. That task has all too often been ignored or evaded.
>
> RONALD SYME: *The Roman Revolution* (Chapter XXII)

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SIX weeks had passed since we had jumped into Albania; six weeks in which we had repaired the shattered network of British Missions and seen for ourselves how matters stood among the Ghegs. Meanwhile the war, the mighty complex of interlocking human struggles, of which ours was but one, had entered on a new phase. British and American troops had landed in France; Rome had fallen; and to the East, between the Black and Baltic seas, the Red armies rolled inexorably forward, now, for the first time, carrying the battle beyond the boundaries of Russia. The final assault on Hitler's "Fortress Europe" had begun; and, as the fate of the occupied countries was once more committed to the chances of battle, the Eastern Question returned to the fore. The telegrams waiting for us at base warned us that the German garrisons in the Balkans might soon be withdrawn to defend the Reich itself. They also informed us that Partisan troops were marching slowly northwards, breathing death and destruction to Abas Kupi and "the reactionary *Bairaktars*". The time had therefore come to make an end of reconnaissance and to draw up a final plan of action. Our talks with Abas Kupi were accordingly postponed till the following day, and we held a council of war

among ourselves. There we took stock of what we had learned, 669+ 648
and sought to impose a definite pattern on the many projects
we had so often revolved on the march, or discussed around
the hearth at night. Our[1] first aim from the beginning had been 725
to raise the Ghegs against the Germans, both with the laudable
object of killing our enemies wherever and whenever possible,
and, above all, so as to disrupt their overland communications:
the main road from Tirana to Scutari and its lateral links with [491]
Macedonia — the roads from Tirana to Dibra and from Scutari
to Kukes and Prizren. These roads were important targets;
for the German troops in Albania depended upon them for
their communications with the Reich, and they also afforded
the second of the two lines of retreat open to the enemy's
garrisons in Greece.

The thinkers who inspire, and the historians who record, 000
the course of revolutions tend naturally to dwell on those
ideological issues which lend them their distinctive character.
In the making, however, they more often appear to the revolutionary,
as wars do to the strategist, in terms of power and
technique. The first object, therefore, of our reconnaissances
had been to discover what was the distribution of power in
North Albania.

The strongest force in the land was still the German army, [727]
but the roots of its strength were abroad, and our journeys 619
had shown us that its influence was on the wane. Among the
Ghegs power lay in the armed might and resources of the tribes,
and, to a much smaller extent, in the wealth of the merchants
and the landowners of the plain. The strength of the tribes
was sapped by their disunity and was never canalised into any
higher unit of organisation than the tribe itself. Nevertheless,
geographical barriers tended to separate the tribes into distinct
regional groups; and, within one or more such groups, they
were sometimes brought together by a man pre-eminent among
them by his personal ability, family tradition, or wealth. Such
a leader enjoyed influence rather than authority; for his
following was never more than a loose, voluntary, and shifting
confederacy of tribes and parts of tribes, intolerant of any form
of discipline. These confederacies were none the less the

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[1] [British underground liaison officers--Analyst]

619 strongest forces among the Ghegs, and their leaders might be identified as the principal " ministers of power ".

*669 Our reconnaissance had shown us that there were at this
619 time five such confederacies among the Ghegs, led respectively by Abas Kupi, Jon Marko Joni, Gani Kryeziu, Muharrem Bairaktar, and Fikri Dine. Of these Abas Kupi was the most powerful ; he swayed the central provinces of Mati, Kruya, and Tirana ; and his influence extended to the tribes of Shiyak, Dibra, the southern *Bairaks* of Mirdita, and the Catholic regions north of the Drin. We reckoned his potential strength at between five thousand and ten thousand rifles ; and he might, besides, enjoy the financial backing of the Tirana merchants and of the landowning *Beys* of Central Albania. Second to him stood Jon Marko Joni, the hereditary Captain of Mirdita. He might command three thousand rifles among his clansmen alone, a further two thousand from the Catholics of the North, and the financial support of the guilds and churches of Scutari. Next in the hierarchy of power came Gani Kryeziu, whose influence was waxing among the Moslem chiefs beyond the Drin, and whose strength was computed at more than two thousand rifles. Almost as powerful was Muharrem Bairaktar, the Lord of Liuma, who might raise a thousand rifles from his own clansmen and as many again from among his confederates in Puka, Lura, and Dibra. Fikri Dine's power was harder to assess and it seemed doubtful whether he could raise even five hundred men alone. It was said, however, that there were six thousand rifles in Dibra ; and, though it was unlikely that more than three thousand could ever be brought into action, the bulk of these might follow Fikri if he fought in alliance with Abas Kupi or Muharrem Bairaktar.

These powerful men thus commanded between them more than fifteen thousand rifles, and, if the fortunes of war were favourable, they might hope to recruit a further ten thousand scattered among the smaller and more isolated clans. At this time, however, they were divided among themselves by ancient feuds, personal jealousies, and their varying attachment to the Allied or to the German cause. Hitherto these divisions had paralysed their strength, but many circumstances were now

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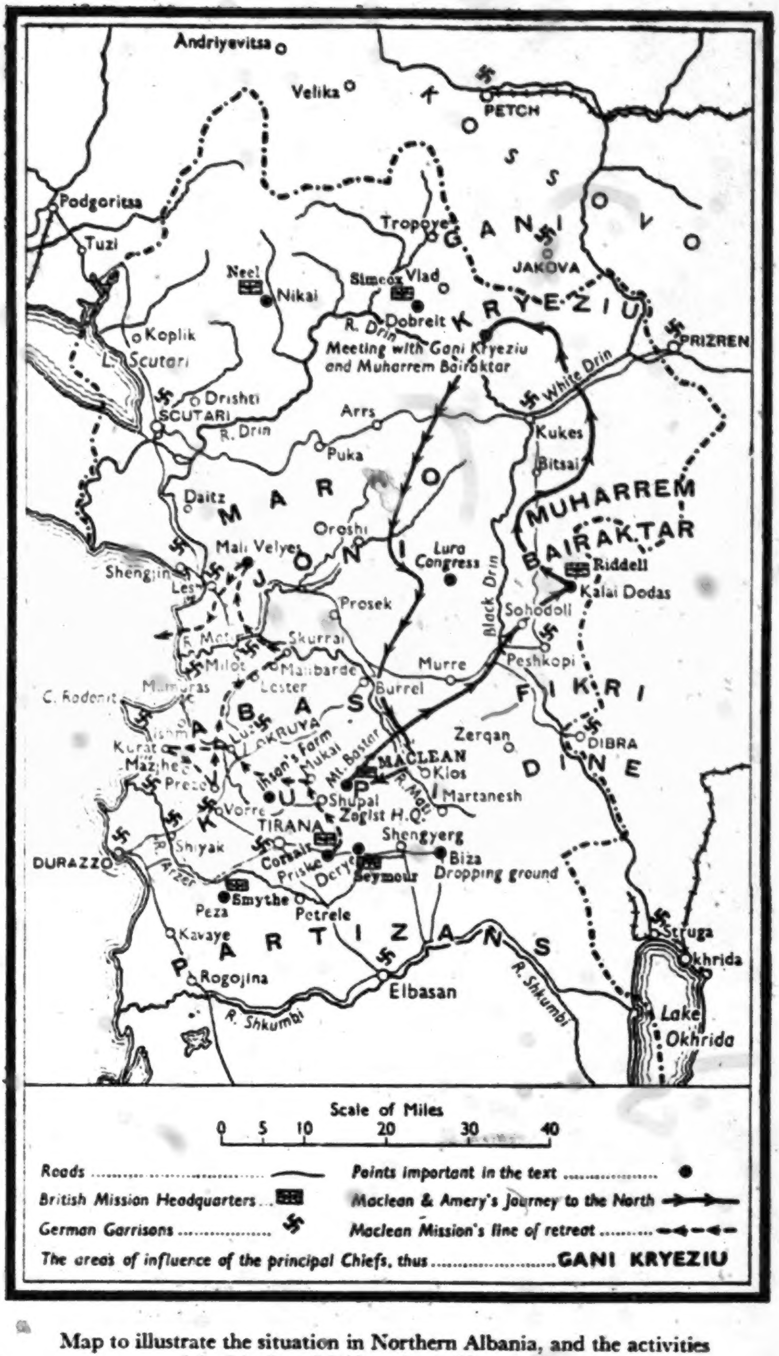
Andriyevitsa
Velika
PETCH
KOSSOVO
Podgoritsa
Tuzi
Tropoye
GANI KRYEZIU
JAKOVA
Neel
Nikai
Simcox
Vlad
Dobreit
R. Drin
Meeting with Gani Kryeziu and Muharrem Bairaktar
PRIZREN
Koplik
L. Scutari
Drishti
SCUTARI
R. Drin
Arrs
White Drin
Kukes
Puka
Bitsai
MARKO JONI
MUHARREM BAIRAKTAR
Daitz
Oroshi
Lura Congress
Mali Velyes
Shengjin
Les
Riddell
Kalai Dodas
Prosek
Black Drin
Sohodoli
R. Mati
Skurrai
Peshkopi
Milot
Malibarde
Murre
Mamuras
Lester
Burrel
C. Rodonit
ABAS KUPI
FIKRI DINE
Ishm
KRUYA
Zerqan
Kurat
Ihsan's Farm
Mukai
Mt. Bastar
MACLEAN
Klos
DIBRA
Mazhe
Preze
Shupal
R. Mati
Martanesh
Vorre
Zogist H.Q.
TIRANA
Shengyerg
Shiyak
Consair
Biza
DURAZZO
R. Arzen
Priske
Derye
Seymour
Dropping ground
Smythe
Peza
Petrele
Kavaye
PARTIZANS
Struga
Khrida
Rogojina
Elbasan
R. Shkumbi
R. Shkumbi
Lake Okhrida
Scale of Miles
0 5 10 20 30 40
Roads
British Mission Headquarters
German Garrisons
Points important in the text
Maclean & Amery's Journey to the North
Maclean Mission's line of retreat
The areas of influence of the principal Chiefs, thus GANI KRYEZIU

Map to illustrate the situation in Northern Albania, and the activities of the Maclean Mission, April–November 1944

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combining to bring them together against the Germans.

The Ghegs, indeed, were stirred by no deep economic or social discontents. The state of anarchy which had prevailed since the collapse of Italian rule was most welcome to the tribes, and they were sustained in their enjoyment of its licence by cheap and plentiful supplies of bread from the granaries of the Kossovo. Their leaders might variously incline towards the Allies or the Germans, but the ordinary tribesmen remained supremely indifferent to the invaders, whom he seldom saw. Hitherto the tribes had therefore favoured a policy of neutrality, but the growing weakness of the Germans of itself supplied a powerful incentive to revolt. The prospect of a German surrender or withdrawal sharply stimulated their predatory appetites ; and their Chiefs, including the "collaborationists" among them, made ready for the day when they might fall upon the stricken Germans to strip them of their power, their weapons, and their wealth.

Left to themselves, the Ghegs would have bided their time until their leaders had discovered that the Germans could be attacked and plundered with impunity. The revolt would thus in all probability have been delayed until the eve of a German retreat, or until Allied forces had landed in Albania. The growth, however, of the L.N.C. introduced a new and disturbing factor into their calculations. The Partisan leaders had already proclaimed themselves the future rulers of Albania and made little secret that, as Communists and as Tosks, they had no room in their scheme of things for the tribal lairds of the North. The Gheg chieftains were thus still further united by the advance of a rival who threatened to deprive them equally of all share in the plunder of the enemy and in the future government of their country.

The Gheg leaders were not afraid of the growth of a Partisan movement in North Albania ; for the conservatism of the tribes, Catholic influence, and the Slav associations of Communism made the mountaineers predominantly hostile to the L.N.C. Nor indeed were they alarmed by the warlike qualities of the Partisans, for they considered themselves a match for Tosk troops of any kind. They knew, however, that the L.N.C.

*669 [619] had for some time been receiving military supplies from the British and would thus be well equipped with mortars and automatic weapons. They were convinced, moreover, that, if Enver Hoja should fail to conquer the North by his own efforts, he could always count on the help of Marshal Tito, and, in the last instance, of Soviet Russia itself.

*669 648 The knowledge that their rivals enjoyed foreign support admonished the Ghegs of their own isolation, and they rightly concluded that their only hope of escaping destruction lay in securing foreign backing for themselves. Seeing that the Partisans were inspired by the Russians and armed by the British, the first reaction of many among them had been to turn to the Germans for help. This, indeed, was the policy pursued by Jon Marko Joni and by Fikri Dine, who sought, though somewhat half-heartedly, to crush the L.N.C. with levies equipped and supported by the Germans. Neither of these leaders any longer believed in a German victory, but they hoped to use the German army to suppress the social revolution before the Allies came. Their policy, however, was openly condemned by Gani Kryeziu and later by Abas Kupi, who both recognised that its success was improbable and that its failure must be disastrous. They held instead that it was only by obtaining British support that the Ghegs might be saved and that they must therefore do all in their power to comply with British demands. These leaders understood, if they did not always approve, our motives in supporting the L.N.C., but they could not believe that a British government would ever allow a Communist, and therefore Russian-controlled, regime to be set up at the entrance to the Adriatic. There were thus two schools of thought among the Gheg leaders as to how best to meet the danger of Communism.

Anglophiles and " collaborationists " publicly accused each other of betraying their common interests, but the line of distinction between them was often blurred and fluctuating. The Anglophiles could scarcely regret the losses which the " collaborationists " inflicted on the L.N.C.; and the " collaborationists ", for their part, regarded the Anglophiles as exponents of an alternative, rather than a contrary, policy to

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ON THE TRAIL BETWEEN LIUMA AND JAKOVA

ANOTHER VIEW BETWEEN LIUMA AND JAKOVA

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GANI KRYEZIU AND HIS STAFF

(*Front row, from Right to Left*) Said Kryeziu, Hassan Kryeziu, Lazar Fundo, Gani Kryeziu, Captain Hibberdine

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which they too might rally if their own efforts should meet with failure. The gulf between them was further narrowed by the growing uncertainty with which they regarded their own policies. The " collaborationists " on the one hand doubted whether the Germans had ever intended to suppress a conflict which diverted Albanian energies into fratricidal channels. The Anglophiles on the other balanced uneasily between extremes of hope and fear: hope that the British would support them as they did General Zervas; fear that they would be abandoned like General Mihailovitch.

At the time of our landing in Albania, Gheg opinion had still been not unevenly divided between these two schools of thought; and we had been impressed by the number of people who expected or hoped for a separate peace between England and Germany. The growing weakness of the Germans, however, had inclined the chiefs increasingly towards us; and we had seen that even Jon Marko Joni thought of changing sides. This was our opportunity; for now that the Gheg leaders recognised that without our help their cause was doomed, they must be prepared to accept our terms. There was thus good reason to believe that they might soon be brought to battle.

000 Having thus analysed the rifle power of the Ghegs and the motives which might lead them to fight, we had next to consider what form of warfare they might be capable of waging. This called for some enquiry into the fundamental principles of revolt — a branch of the military art on which the text-books of the Staff College offered but little guidance. Our masters had been Lawrence and Wingate: from Wingate we had learned the theory of the "striking force"; from Lawrence much about example and the use of gold. Neither, however, had encountered the curious dichotomy of revolt which faced us in Albania and which was the cause of so much confusion at Headquarters. Lawrence, indeed, had written that " revolt was more like peace than like war ", but this had only been to state the problem. War and revolt were both extensions of politics; but it seemed to us that revolt was really war in reverse — the process whereby the vertical relationship between

000 conqueror and conquered was changed into the horizontal juxtaposition of rival belligerents.

In war the contending parties faced each other across a more or less clearly demarcated front line. Behind the front the writ of each government ran much as in time of peace ; the state continued to protect the essential interests of the public ; and the resources of society were harnessed to each nation's war effort. The fortunes of battle might lead to the loss of large tracts of territory, but the government concerned would continue to administer the remainder, where its subjects might safely retire with their families and at least their movable property. The development of total war had increased the dangers and responsibilities of the home front, but the heaviest burden still fell on the armed forces who were called on to defend, if necessary with their lives, the land, the property, and the non-combatants of the nation. War was thus a process in which a whole community was organised for offence or defence under its natural leaders ; in which those with the greatest stake in the community had most interest in the result ; and in which the combatants bore the heaviest burden. Victory was only complete when the front line had ceased to exist.

Revolt began where war ended ; for in revolt there was no front line ; and the insurgents and their enemies lived cheek by jowl in the same towns, and even in the same streets. Revolt was, by definition, irregular and became war, in fact if not in law, as soon as the insurgents could defend and administer wide, inhabited regions ; as soon, that is, as they passed from guerilla to positional warfare. Until then the state powers of protection and coercion remained the monopoly of their opponents, and the insurgents could do little to defend the relatives or the property of their supporters. This was their weakness and at the same time their strength : it prevented them from defending fixed positions, but it left them free to fight only on ground of their own choosing and to disperse rather than face unequal odds. Their conditions of life might be harsh, but they were less dangerous than a soldier's in battle ; a guerilla had only his own life to defend ; and to escape from foreign soldiers was no great problem for an able-bodied man fighting in his own country. This elusiveness of the guerillas drove their opponents to indirect retaliation ; they imprisoned their families and confiscated their property, and even proceeded against the harmless villagers who had failed to denounce or to prevent their operations. Thus, in revolt, the heaviest burden fell not on the combatants, as in war, but on the wives and children, the cattle and the homes which remained as hostages in the hands of the enemy. 000

It followed from this that the elements most naturally inclined to revolt were the young who had no family responsibilities and the " have-nots ", who had no property to lose. To them revolt offered faith, discipline, and a way of life ; and the strength which they acquired collectively in battle afforded hopes of wealth and power in the event of victory. They started from nothing ; their organisation was moulded in the forge of war ; its growth was slow. Prolonged guerilla warfare was thus their natural military expression. By the same token, those with a stake in the country were at a disadvantage in guerilla war ; for their families and possessions were so many hostages in the hands of the enemy. Heroes among them might sacrifice their all to fight for freedom ; the braver sort would run great risks for great gains ; but the majority would only take the field if they knew that their families and homes were safe from enemy reprisals. Without such protection, indeed, either they would withdraw their support from the revolt or else the social order itself would be transformed by the destruction through reprisals of the property relationships on which it was based. The leaders of an established society would therefore tend to postpone revolt until their hopes of victory outweighed their fears of reprisals. At the same time — and this was their great advantage over the other sort of revolutionaries — if they once decided to fight, they would not have to create a new organisation but would go into action with the full force of an organised community behind them.

Applied to the situation in Albania, this theory[1] explained the difference between the Partisans and the Gheg tribal confederacies, and showed that their military efforts must 669* 619 725

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[1] [cf. cat. 116, pp. 165-167 -- Analyst]

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naturally develop along different lines. The Partisans had started as a small Communist cell, destitute of resources, and had slowly recruited their forces from among the landless peasants and the youth of the towns. By joining an avowedly social-revolutionary movement these recruits had become outlaws; there could be no turning back; and, since they lacked personal wealth or the backing of a tribe, they were easily subjected to the discipline of a movement on which they depended for their daily bread. With no resources of their own, the Partisans had to fight if they would eat, and thus were driven from one raid to another by sheer necessity. Nor was their zeal for war and plunder restrained by fear of reprisals against property; for they were, by definition, of the dispossessed. Indeed they might even welcome reprisals; for, by adding to the number of the dispossessed, reprisals added to the number of their potential supporters, while the destruction of property which they involved weakened the economic foundations of a hostile social order. The operations of the Partisans, therefore, took the form of sustained guerilla raids; and their movement fed on the devastation which it caused and grew, Phoenix-like, from the ashes of its own defeats. Sometimes they attacked the Germans; more often they plundered their richer compatriots; but whether they advanced the cause of national liberation or of social revolution, the bitterness of their enemies convinced them that they could never lay aside their arms with impunity, except as masters of Albania. Thus discipline was seconded by experience of battle, and morale was fortified by the knowledge that their only hope of safety lay in victory.

The conditions of a Gheg rising were altogether different, for the Gheg leaders were the representatives of the existing social order; and their strength was rooted in the tribal system. Gheg armies were nothing but the tribes on a war footing; and each contingent marched under the orders of its own tribal chief. In the simple conditions of highland life considerable forces might thus be mustered at little more than a day's notice; and each tribesman in them would be a natural guerilla and an accurate marksman. Discipline, however, was rare; the habit of team work unknown; and at every stage in a

campaign protracted negotiations supplied the place of concise 669*
orders. But, besides being invertebrate, Gheg armies were also 619
short-winded; for they depended for their food supplies on 725
the bounty of the clans, and no region could long support the expense of a campaign. The tribesmen, moreover, were shepherds and farmers, and, as such, were continually distracted by domestic cares and especially sensitive to the threat of reprisals against property. To obtain their support, therefore, the revolt must be a paying proposition; and it was essential to show that the prospects of plunder or subsidies would exceed the probable costs of fighting and outweigh the expectation of losses through reprisals.

This fundamental consideration lent certain distinctive features to the warfare of the Ghegs. They required a sufficient extent of territory as a " safe harbour " into which the non-combatants might withdraw with their flocks and movable property beyond the reach of enemy punitive expeditions. They sought to raise the strongest possible fighting force, not only for its weight in the attack, but also to deter the enemy from lightly sending out troops to devastate their homes. Above all, they aimed at achieving a decisive victory in the shortest possible time, so as to win the spoils of war without incurring expenses or reprisals. The Gheg tribes were thus wholly unsuited to sustained guerilla raids which involved living on the country and might lead to heavy reprisals. Instead, their natural form of offensive war was a general revolt, based on the full extent of their territory, supported by the strongest available forces and directed to attaining their objective in the shortest possible time.

We had seen for ourselves that no single Gheg leader swayed a broad enough region or a sufficient following to challenge the Germans alone. But if the five great chieftains, Abas Kupi, Gani Kryeziu, Muharrem Bairaktar, Jon Marko Joni, and Fikri Dine, were to rise up together they would encounter the German army on more equal terms. Their combined territories would provide an impenetrable " safe harbour " where the non-combatants could withdraw with their flocks and where the tribesmen might await military

*669 669 619 725 supplies from Italy without fear of enemy interception. Their combined forces, moreover, would amount to somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five thousand rifles, which would be rapidly reinforced with mortars and machine-guns from the Allied arsenals. Such an army would be comparable in numbers, if not in equipment, and superior in valour, if inferior in discipline, to that of the L.N.C.; nor was it by any means certain that the Germans still possessed the energy or could spare the troops for its suppression. We concluded, therefore, that Gheg resistance against the Germans must take the form of a general revolt.

*669 This conception of a general revolt had for some weeks been shaping in our minds; and we had already prepared the ground for its fulfilment in our preliminary negotiations with the Gheg leaders. Gani Kryeziu was already fighting the Germans; agreement with Abas Kupi seemed to hang on instructions from King Zog; Muharrem Bairaktar had announced his readiness to take the field if armed; and Jon Marko Joni and Fikri Dine had sounded Abas Kupi to learn on what terms they might now change sides. Starting from this foundation the next step was to reach final agreement with Abas Kupi. Once this had been done we would summon a congress of all the Gheg leaders and their satellite chiefs and invite them to proclaim a general revolt of North Albania. At such a congress Abas Kupi and Gani Kryeziu would naturally exert all their influence to bring the other leaders into the war beside them; and we were confident that Muharrem Bairaktar and the Dibran chiefs would not be slow to follow their example. Jon Marko Joni might show more reluctance but, despite his close connections with the enemy, we doubted whether he would long resist the prospects of plunder, the hopes of power, and the promises of rifles and gold.

Our chances of success, however, were threatened by the danger of a conflict between the Zogists and the Partisans; and this it was our duty to prevent for weighty reasons, military and political: military, because civil war must consume the energies of both resistance movements at the expense of their operations against the Germans; political, because the probable event of a Partisan victory would lead to the establishment of a Russian dominated dictatorship; a result which would be in keeping neither with our advocacy of democratic government, nor indeed with our more permanent interests. We were soldiers and in our minds the importance of "War Aims" was naturally overshadowed by the purely military problem of how to beat the Germans. Nevertheless we could not altogether escape political responsibility; for we were the only British representatives in North Albania, and we knew that British policy in that country must in part at least be informed by our reports.

At this time the only Partisan forces in North Albania were the "Kosmet" group, about a hundred strong, and two small bands, each of some thirty men, which were tolerated in their regions by Abas Kupi and Muharrem Bairaktar to please our Mission. There was thus no Partisan problem among the Ghegs; but the main forces of the L.N.C. were moving northwards towards the Shkumbi; and it could not be long before they came up against the Zogist outposts. No one could say with certainty whether civil war might then be averted; but we knew that the Zogists would resist any attempt by the Partisans to enter their territories.

We realised that civil war must disappoint our hopes of a Gheg revolt; for it was too much to expect that Abas Kupi or any of the tribal leaders should fight against the Germans and the Partisans at the same time. We feared besides that the Zogists might be reduced to such straits by the Partisans that they would accept help from the "collaborationists", or even from the Germans. The natural right of self-defence might justify such action; but, if the Zogists once became involved with the Germans, from whatever motive, it might become impossible for us to continue to support them. Such a situation had just arisen in Yugoslavia and had led, for reasons not unconnected with the Conferences of Cairo and Teheran, to the withdrawal of the British Missions from General Mihailovitch. We had often reminded Abas Kupi of this example; and he had offered in return to meet the Partisan leaders and seek agreement with them. Enver Hoja, however, had con-

*69 temptuously rejected these proposals and already stigmatised the passivity of the Zogists as " collaboration " with the enemy. It was difficult, indeed, to see how interests so diametrically opposed might yet be reconciled. Abas Kupi represented the ancient supremacy of the Ghegs, the oligarchy of the tribal chiefs and a Nationalist tradition which looked to Great Britain as the Power most interested in assuring Albanian independence. Enver Hoja represented the self-assertion of the Tosks, the Communist will to power, and an exclusively Russian orientation in foreign policy. The decline of German fortunes had dissolved their short-lived community of interests; and events had now come to a pass where each rightly discerned in the other's attitude towards the invaders nothing but a manœuvre in their domestic struggle for power. Now only Abas Kupi stood between Enver Hoja and his goal; for, if Central Albania was once reduced, the other Gheg chiefs would be in no position to offer effective resistance to the L.N.C. Our information indeed suggested that Enver was already planning to attack the Zogists with the deliberate intention of driving them into the arms of the Germans and so discrediting them before the Allies. To identify rivals with enemies was part of Communist stock-in-trade; and it was by similar tactics that the Balli Kombetar had been destroyed.

The prospects of settlement were bleak, but we knew that some of the Partisan leaders disagreed with Enver Hoja's policy. It still seemed possible, moreover, that, if Abas Kupi took the field with the chief men among the Ghegs, Albanian public opinion might cause the Partisans to hesitate before attacking so popular and strong a leader. Besides, once Abas Kupi was at war, our Headquarters would be justified in bringing the strongest pressure to bear on the Partisans in favour of a reconciliation with the Zogists.

000 These conclusions were duly embodied into telegrams with a strong recommendation in favour of relaxing our insistence on the policy of " No arms before action ". Our inability to give political assurances only seemed to increase the importance of providing the chiefs with some alternative encouragement. Besides, surprise was of the essence of a general revolt,

and the success of the initial uprising would require some previous accumulation of arms. Beyond this it only remained for us to consider how strongly we should urge our plan upon Headquarters. Many factors in the situation remained imponderable; many obstacles still stood in the way of its fulfilment. Nevertheless we expressed our conviction that a general revolt offered the best, perhaps the only, means of bringing the Ghegs to fight the Germans and of averting civil war. 000

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THE day of our return to base had thus been devoted to the study of accumulated telegrams and to the discussion of plans. Abas Kupi had meanwhile withdrawn with his following to a near-by village, but returned to our camp next day to resume negotiations. Besides the Zogist chiefs of Central Albania he was now accompanied by Nik Sokol and Father Lek Luli. Nik Sokol was a tall, square-headed adventurer, who defended the Zogist interest in the lands beyond the Drin. His counsels swayed the *Bairaktars* of Nikai and Mertur, and he had for some time afforded hospitality in those regions to Neel and his Mission. Father Lek was a dark and turbulent young monk from Scutari, who preached the Gospel of Christ and the cause of King Zog with equal zeal to the Catholic tribes of the North. He wore the brown cowl and sandals of the Franciscan order; and the pistol and submachine-gun which he carried bore witness to his militant conception of the priesthood. 669*

The sun shone and the numerous retinues of the Zogist chiefs milled around the camp, especially about the kitchens, or spread themselves on the broad, grassy slopes of the clearing. They were armed to the teeth and made a brave show in their ragged, but striking, costumes, whose varied style and colours proclaimed their several native districts. A few played cards with thumbed and grimy packs, but the greater part sat and smoked in silence, or gravely discussed the politics of their tribes. Sometimes one of them would seek to buy another's weapons, perhaps yielding his own in part exchange. Such

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commerce involved prolonged bargaining; for arms were the chief interest of the mountaineers, and regarded by them as their most valuable possessions. The younger guerillas, however, exchanged their weapons freely in token of comradeship; and among Petrit Kupi's personal following submachine-guns and revolvers were continually changing hands.

Such gatherings were a severe drain on our resources, for the laws of hospitality and the prestige of our Mission required that we should entertain the guerillas on a lavish scale. They afforded, however, a most welcome opportunity for discussions with the minor chieftains and allowed us, in the performance of our duties as hosts, to sound the feelings of the rank and file. On this occasion we entertained the chiefs and provided liberally for their bodyguards. Then, when all had eaten, we led Abas Kupi and Said Kryeziu apart to a sheltered ledge just beyond the ridge which rose above our camp. There we might talk undisturbed, looking out over the Shupal valley and away to the Qaf Tuyanit, the gap in the mountain wall which guards the northern approaches to Tirana. Sentries were posted out of earshot to restrain the curiosity of the tribesmen, and now that Said was with us we had no need of the never-too-accurate, or too discreet, interpreters. In Said we had complete confidence, for his brother, Gani, was already fighting; and every consideration of personal honour, family interest, and political opinion engaged him to do his best to bring Abas Kupi back into the war.

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Three weeks had passed since we had conferred with Abas Kupi at Shupal, but our Headquarters had not yet approved or rejected any of our proposals. The Foreign Office had not decided whether to seek private instructions for Abas Kupi from King Zog, and had advised us meanwhile to " keep the pot boiling " ; an operation which — as I ruefully reflected — leads in politics, as in physics, to the eventual evaporation of the contents. Nor had our colleagues with the Partisans succeeded in persuading Enver Hoja to accept Abas Kupi's proposal for a meeting between delegates of their two parties. Meanwhile the telegrams from Bari suggested that opinion there remained unyielding in its attachment to the formula of "No arms before action" and might already be inclining to unilateral support of the Partisans. 000

With no word from Headquarters which might have strengthened our hand in negotiations, we could only draw on events for new arguments with which to urge Abas Kupi to take the field. Maclean accordingly gave an impressive exposition of the military situation in Europe, pointing out how closely developments were conforming to the forecast of events which we had made to the Agha at our first meeting. He spoke of the significance of the British landing in France, drew particular attention to the progress of our troops along the western shores of the Adriatic, and stressed ambiguously the importance of the Russian victories in Poland and Roumania. The Allies were now making the supreme bid for victory; and the time had come for all who were our friends, or who wished to share in our triumph, to play their part. Then, turning to the local situation, he dwelt on the northward advance of the Partisans, whose forces were already reported across the river Shkumbi. The danger of civil war was grave; if it broke out before Abas Kupi had attacked the Germans we should be in no position to restrain the Partisans; and then he would be left alone. The sands were running out: it was high time to take the field. Gani Kryeziu was already fighting and might even then be receiving supplies; the Zogists had only to follow his example and arms would be dropped to them at once. All North Albania was waiting on Abas Kupi, and if he gave the lead the Ghegs would rise together in revolt. 669*

Abas Kupi listened without a word and remained deep in thought for some moments after Maclean had done. Then in a single sentence he registered his disappointment at our failure to obtain instructions from King Zog or to arrange a meeting with the Partisan leaders. These were points which he might well have laboured, but with great delicacy he forebore from dwelling on a weakness of which we were only too painfully aware. We saw, however, that he was reluctant to expose his whole organisation to the risks of war against a mere promise of supplies, backed by no assurances, or even signs, of political support. As a cornered chess player tests every

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possible move, so he probed each of our arguments in turn. To attack the L.N.C. was to break off relations with the British. To remain neutral was to expose himself to a Partisan offensive without hope of British support. To attack the Germans might seem to be the only course left open, but, if he chose it, would the tribesmen follow? And if they did, had they enough rifles and cartridges to hold the field until supplies were sent?

At length, after nearly five hours' discussion, Abas Kupi suggested that we should adjourn to allow him to return to his camp before dark. There he would consult with the Zogist chiefs and in the morning would bring us their reply. He left us, therefore, and that evening held a council of war with the chiefs; he told them the result of our talks; and each then spoke in turn for revolt or for neutrality. The younger men, hungry for adventure and untrammelled by the cares of property, were eager for a fight in which they might win their spurs. The older chiefs, however, declared that they could not make war without initial supplies of arms. The attempt would only lead to the destruction of their movement and to the absorption of its remnants by the Partisans. If the British really wanted their support they would send them arms; if not, then it were better to husband their forces against the dangers of civil war. The discussion was prolonged; and Said, with Father Lek, pleaded for immediate action. No formal vote was taken, but it was clear at the end that Abas Kupi must incline to the view of the older men; for, without their support, he could neither raise the clans nor keep them fed.

Next morning broke grey and cold; and, when we resumed our talks with Abas Kupi, we saw at once that the chiefs had pronounced against us. The Agha explained quietly that he was ready to attack the Germans as soon as we sent him supplies of arms, but that, without supplies, he could not and would not fight. He was ready to discuss the quantities of arms that would be required, but if we insisted on the formula of "No arms before action" he could only offer to escort us to the coast for evacuation. We racked our brains for some saving formula; but there was nothing more to be said: we stood at the parting of the ways. The deadlock seemed absolute when 669* suddenly a messenger was passed through the guards with an urgent letter for Abas Kupi. The Agha broke the seals and, since he could not read, handed the letter to Said. It was from the Zogist commander in Shiyak, the region to the south-west of Tirana, and reported that his forces had just been attacked by a body of Partisans. The Zogists had held their own; and the Partisans appeared to have withdrawn.

Abas Kupi turned grey and became suddenly very still, as men sometimes do when in great pain. There in his hand was the proof of all our argument. We sat without speaking for fully five minutes; and then Said suggested that we should adjourn for the midday meal. We ate together in silence; and as soon as he had finished Abas Kupi went off and sat down on the hillside, calling three of the principal chiefs to his side. Presently it came on to rain; and it was in a mood of deep despondency that we gathered in Smiley's hut to hear what the Agha might say. He began by suggesting that we should refer our problems to the proposed congress of Gheg chiefs. We answered firmly that we could not agree to calling such a congress until we had first come to terms with him. Then, seeing at last that there was no other way out, he said:

"Very well; you shall have action. Let Major Smiley come to me tomorrow and I will choose him a bridge. If he will bring the dynamite I will provide the men. Then you can tell your Headquarters that Abas Kupi is fighting again."

We embraced in token of agreement and Smiley produced 000 a bottle of cherry brandy from under his bed. He had been bored and depressed by "all this politics", but now brightened suddenly and was anxious to celebrate the prospect of "blowing something up".

The Zogist leaders stayed the night with us and, by a fortunate coincidence, witnessed an air sortie from Italy. The wireless operator had reported that the 'plane was due at 1 A.M.; and accordingly, soon after midnight, we had put out fires in a prearranged pattern on the hillside. Within a few minutes of the scheduled time we could hear the distant drone of the

000 engines as the pilot circled above looking for our signals. Presently the drone grew louder and became a roar as the 'plane suddenly emerged from the night, topping the crest of the ridge by no more than five hundred feet. A rectangle of light marked the door in its flank; and there, as it passed over the fires, we could see small black figures heaving the containers out into space. A moment later we became aware of five or six parachutes floating down towards us. The 'plane circled and returned a dozen times to discharge its cargo. First came the breakable supplies, packed in containers attached to parachutes; then the "free drops" — bundles of blankets, boots, and clothing — which crashed around us like bombs and almost demolished the tent where Maclean had retired to bed. When all the stores had been dropped the 'plane circled once more and, dipping over the fires, flashed red and green lights in a farewell salute. Most of the parachutes fell near the fires; and, though the rapacious mountaineers robbed us of some of them, the greater part were safely collected at dawn. On examination their contents proved to be mainly clothes, tinned food, and medical supplies for the maintenance of our Mission. Nevertheless the "drop" was an impressive demonstration to the Zogist leaders of our power to support them when they should take the field.

*669 In the morning the chiefs dispersed to their homes; Abas Kupi returned to his headquarters at Shupal; and Nik Sokol with Father Lek Luli set out on the trek to the north. With them also went George Seymour, who planned to make his way to Berane in Montenegro. Berane was held by Marshal Tito's Partisans, who had built an air-strip there, from which Seymour hoped to fly back to Italy. Beyond the Drin he parted from Nik Sokol, but was accompanied as far as the Yugoslav border by Father Lek and by his Tosk batman, Rifaat, who had served with the British Mission for more than a year. Seymour reached Berane without incident, but, several weeks later, we learned that Father Lek and Rifaat had been arrested by the Kosmet Partisans on their way back through Krasniqi. They were brought before Mehmet Hoja, the commissar, who had them tortured to make them reveal the details of Abas Kupi's negotiations with our Mission. They were whipped, their fingers were broken, and they were branded with hot irons; but the monk remained unyielding; and the servant could not disclose the secrets he had never known. At length, exasperated by their silence and to destroy the evidence of his own cruelty, Mehmet gave the order to cut their throats; and they were slaughtered like cattle.

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WHEN the Zogist leaders had gone from the camp, Smiley[1] had set about sorting out his demolition devices, or " toys " as he called them, in preparation for the attack on the bridge. He was well versed in the qualities of the different explosives and knew exactly which required to be treated with respect and which might safely be handled with rougher intimacy. The rest of us, however, were imperfectly initiated in these mysteries; and Smiley took a malicious pleasure in filling us with alarm and despondency by dropping sacks of dynamite with seeming carelessness, or tossing them to his bodyguards to be loaded on to the mules. The sweet, plasticine-like smell of explosives pervaded the camp; and to our horror, and this time to Smiley's, one of the mules began rolling to free itself from the unwelcome burden. There were no accidents, however, and towards evening Smiley set out with Sergeant Jenkins and his interpreter, Veli, followed by a few bodyguards and a string of pack animals.

He found Abas Kupi in Vilze, two hours' march away, and there considered with him and Said the choice of a target. They studied maps of the Tirana–Scutari road, heard reports from peasants who knew the districts through which it passed, and eventually, at Abas Kupi's suggestion, decided on the bridge at Gyoles. This was one of the biggest bridges in Albania, situated to the south-west of Kruya, a few miles south of the point where the main road forks west to Durazzo and north to Scutari. Its destruction would therefore interrupt all main-

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[1] [British demolitions expert -- Analyst]

*669 road traffic between Tirana and these two cities.

Smiley accordingly set out next day, escorted by a *cheta* of a dozen Zogists, picked by Petrit Kupi[1] and commanded by one Ramiz, a gay and fearless youth who had followed the Agha since 1941. They crossed the Kruya mountains and, descending to the plain, slept the night in the village of Luz, near the main road. In the morning Smiley put on Albanian clothes and, leaving Jenkins in charge of the explosives, went out with Ramiz to reconnoitre the bridge. They walked boldly down the road, passing several German convoys, and presently came on their target. It was an imposing, concrete structure, consisting of three arches supported on thick pillars sunk in a broad river bed. No sentries were posted on the bridge itself, but fifty yards from its northern end was a fortified post, held by a company of German infantry. Near the post was a café, and there Smiley enjoyed a glass of beer while Ramiz learnt the local gossip from the publican. The two then walked back to the bridge, crossed it at the same time as a party of Germans, and, turning off into the fields, made their way down to the river bed as if to wash.

The river at this time of year was reduced to a narrow stream, not more than a few inches deep, and confined under a single span of the bridge. The two thus had no difficulty in walking right under the bridge itself; and Smiley was able to consider at leisure where he might best lay his charge. This is the most crucial operation in any demolition, and, in a concrete structure, often presents special difficulties. The methodical Germans, however, had already prepared the bridge for demolition in the event of an Allied landing, and, with typical thoroughness, had even inscribed above each demolition chamber the exact quantity of explosive required. The study of these figures admonished Smiley that his supply of " toys " was insufficient for the job. He therefore climbed back on to the road with Ramiz and, walking back to Luz, despatched a messenger to base for a further mule-load of explosives.

Two days must pass before these arrived; and Smiley therefore transferred his headquarters to the house of a well-disposed Catholic farmer who lived only a few hundred yards

[1] [Oldest son of Gheg chieftain Abas Kupi -- Analyst]

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THE CITY OF JAKOVA

BEYOND THE DRIN

[-180a-]

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SMILEY AND HIS CHETA, AFTER THE ACTION AT THE GYOLES BRIDGE

(Ramiz is seated on the extreme right)

GEORGE SEYMOUR AND PATER LEK LULI

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from the bridge. The night, as so often in Albania, was disturbed by sporadic shooting, enlivened on this occasion by green Very lights fired from the German post. The saboteur, like the murderer, feels that he is watched by a thousand eyes; and Smiley was relieved to learn that the shooting was nothing but a skirmish between blood enemies which had resulted in four fatal casualties. The Germans, fearing an attack by guerillas, had loosed off Very lights, a sure sign that they were growing jumpy.

Rumours of Smiley's presence, however, alarmed the peaceful farmers; and the local Zogist leader came next day and begged him to leave the district, saying that the Germans were already on his trail. Smiley rightly guessed that the good man was moved by fear of reprisals rather than by any certain knowledge and coolly refused to move. Instead he referred the whole matter to Abas Kupi, who wrote instructing his representative to give Smiley every assistance and to defend him if he should be attacked to the last man and the last round.

In the night Smiley's messenger at last returned with two mule-loads of explosives. These were sorted in the course of the following day and, after dark, were man-handled down to the river bed by the bodyguard. The guerillas then withdrew to cover the operation while Smiley, with Jenkins, Ramiz, and Veli, began packing their charges into the appropriate demolition chambers. While they worked in the darkness a constant stream of traffic passed overhead; and once a German troop-carrying lorry drew up on the bridge for half an hour to mend a puncture. At last, towards three o'clock in the morning, the charges were laid and the fuses set. Smiley then climbed on to the road and sowed the surface of the bridge with a few "tyre bursters". These were small mines, disguised as innocent stones or mule-shit, but powerful enough to blow the wheel off a big lorry. They would stop any convoy that might pass before the explosion and thus would engulf lorries and crews in the ruin of the bridge. His foresight was rewarded, and within ten minutes two German lorries drove on to the "tyre bursters" and were brought to a standstill. The drivers got down to investigate. A few minutes passed. Then came a

*669 flash of yellow light, and with a deafening roar the three spans of the Gyoles bridge collapsed. The terrified German soldiers loosed off Very lights, tracer bullets, and mortar bombs in all directions while Smiley and his companions melted into the forests.

The bridge was utterly destroyed; and it was six weeks before the Germans could put up even a temporary wooden structure in its place. During these six weeks, all traffic from Tirana to the North and to Durazzo was diverted along a narrow dust track. This involved a detour of ten miles and became impassable every time there was heavy rain.

Smiley returned to base on the evening of the 21st of June with Ramiz and his companions. He was full of praise for their courage and discipline; and his own powers of leadership were attested by their affectionate devotion: " '*Smail shum burr i mir* " — " Ismail (Smiley), he very good man " — Ramiz would say, earnestly shaking his head. We gave them a feast to celebrate their action; for at last we had drawn blood. The Zogists were at war again and might now claim supplies from us with justice.

Abas Kupi joined us next morning to resume the talks we had interrupted a week earlier. We congratulated him on ' this of the bridge '; but he told us at once that the operation was only a token of his good faith. We must now agree what quantity of supplies we were to send him before he could undertake further attacks.

We had at first been inclined to regard his insistence on supplies as primarily a bargaining manœuvre, but we were by now convinced that he would not take the field without arms and subsidies. It was true that Gani Kryeziu had gone into action without receiving preliminary supplies, but Said himself explained to us why Abas Kupi would never follow Gani's example. Gani's potential force was estimated at two thousand rifles, but without supplies, as he had frankly told us, he could only raise some two hundred men. He had agreed to fight with so small a force in the hope that the arms which we had promised him would arrive soon enough and in sufficient

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quantities to outweigh the effects of any German reprisals. If this hope was fulfilled then the rest of his supporters would rally to his standard; if it was disappointed his influence must decline until he was left with no more than a personal bodyguard. Gani trusted the British and knew how desperate was the situation of the Ghegs; he had therefore complied with our instructions and staked his personal prestige and the very existence of his movement on immediate and unconditional revolt. Abas Kupi saw the problem in a very different light. He knew that as matters stood he could not raise the tribes without arms or subsidies. If, therefore, he fought without supplies it would be with small forces; and, if these were inadequately supported by the British, the whole structure of tribal alliances which he had built up would crash in ruins. His confidence in the British had been severely shaken by our failure to obtain instructions from King Zog, or to restrain the hostile propaganda of the L.N.C. He was therefore determined not to take the field until we should make it possible for him to do so in force.

Confidence can only be restored by deeds: we therefore decided to accept in principle his request for supplies and to regard the destruction of the Gyoles bridge as evidence that the Zogists were at war again. We turned, therefore, to the problem of deciding exactly what weapons and other sinews of war Abas Kupi would need before he could raise the standard of revolt. The Zogist staff in Shupal had already prepared detailed specifications for their demands which we accepted as a basis for negotiation. Our talks lasted two days; and, on the morning of 23rd June, agreement was reached at last. It was settled that Abas Kupi would fight as soon as we had supplied him with sufficient mortars, bren-guns, heavy machine-guns, and anti-tank rifles to equip on an agreed scale eight *chetas*, each of two hundred and fifty men. These were to form the shock troops of the revolt and the nuclei around which the tribes might gather.

The terms of this agreement had still to be ratified by our Headquarters, but we were convinced that they represented Abas Kupi's minimum demands. We telegraphed Bari

*669 accordingly, and, trusting to their consent, pressed on at once with our plans for revolt. Merret was sent with Sergeants Jones and Jenkins to establish a rear base in the mountains of Matsukull, north of the river Mati, where supplies might be received in greater safety than at our camp on Mount Bastar. Meanwhile, with Abas Kupi's approval, we despatched messengers to the leading Gheg chiefs, inviting them to meet us on the 4th of July in the Plain of Lura.

The details of our agreement were kept a strict secret, but the news that we had agreed was soon widely known; and morale rose among the Zogists. The mountains, however, are a great whispering gallery; and it was not long before an account of our discussions was in Enver Hoja's hands.

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[727] THE Germans, meanwhile,[1] had launched a political offensive which required our immediate attention. The "collaborationist" Prime Minister, Rejeb Bey Mitrovitsa, had been forced to resign on the suspicion that his failure to proceed actively against the Partisans had not been altogether involuntary. Since then Dr. Neubacher, the German Minister of State in the Balkans, had arrived by 'plane from Belgrade and had approached a number of Albanian political leaders, including some of known pro-Allied sympathies. To these he had represented that, whatever their sympathies in the war, it was now their duty as patriots to form a coalition government to stem the advance of the Communists. He had promised subsidies and military supplies, and had hinted darkly that he had good reason to believe that the British would no longer view such action with disfavour.

We saw at once that the formation of an anti-Communist front under German aegis must confuse the public mind and seriously prejudice our plans for a revolt of the Ghegs. A week would pass before our Headquarters could approve the terms of our agreement with Abas Kupi, or send the first consignment of supplies; and we therefore decided to go down

[1] [in mid-1944 -- Analyst]

meanwhile to the plain to the house of Ihsan Toptani, to 669 throw a spanner into the wheels of German diplomacy.

A son of Abdi Bey, one of the founders of modern Albania, [621] and a nephew of the famous Essad Pasha, Ihsan was now the head of the powerful Toptani clan. Under the monarchy he had remained aloof from politics, but during the war had shown himself a staunch, if prudent, supporter of the Allied cause. Independent of party, he was yet in touch with all parties and, since he was politically and financially disinterested, his opinion was respected by all. The care of his estates, natural caution, and an instinctive aversion to violence and disorder had hitherto prevented him from taking an active part in the guerilla movement. Instead he had remained in the background, emerging now and then to act as intermediary between the different guerilla factions, or as their link with the political leaders in Tirana. Thus, in the autumn of 1943, he had undertaken the preliminary negotiations between the Partisan and the Ballist leaders, and had acted as host to their meeting at Mukai. Later, in the disasters of the winter, he had taken in Colonel Nicholls and sheltered him during his last agonies. Since that time he had maintained close relations with the British Missions; and it was from his house that Hare conducted his campaign to spread disaffection among the enemy's garrison in Tirana.

Maclean and I accordingly set out with Hare and, crossing 000 the Shupal valley, reached the head of the Qaf Bechit in the late afternoon. This was a precipitous col between Mount Daiti and Mount Berar, over which ran the shorter but less frequented track to the capital. The light was clear and from 361 a jutting crag just below the col I saw Tirana for the first time. The capital city of Albania lies in a broad and fertile plain, surrounded by a crescent of mountains, open towards the sea. Thirty years before it had been little more than a village; now it was a prosperous town, a blend of East and West, boasting a population of some thirty thousand souls. Through my field-glasses I made out slender minarets rising between tall modern buildings, a long rambling suq or bazaar, and several broad, leafy avenues, flanked by whitewashed and red-roofed villas, set in green and shady gardens. There lay the prize for the victors in this many-sided struggle.

000 set in green and shady gardens. There lay the prize for the victors in this many-sided struggle.

Ihsan's house was situated in the plain to the north-west of Tirana and some five hours' march from the mountain village of Priske, where we stopped for our evening meal. The presence of German patrols made it dangerous to go down into the plain before dark and required us to reach our destination before dawn. Ihsan had sent an escort of his bodyguards to meet us, but we sat too long over our meal and scarcely left ourselves time for the journey. The darkness of the night concealed us from the enemy, but it equally obscured from us the many pitfalls by which our path was beset. The tracks leading down from the mountain were slippery, for it had been raining; and I fell over several times. Once in the plain the way led along a dry watercourse, filled with ankle-spraining stones and short, thorny scrub. Down at sea-level the night was hot and dank; and clouds of mosquitoes tormented our brief halts. But brief they were; for the guides kept an anxious watch on the eastern mountains, where the sky would first grow pale, and loped ahead, coaxing us on with false assurances that we should soon be there. At last the rumble of lorries warned us that we were approaching a road. This was the dust track along which traffic between Tirana and the North had been diverted since the destruction of the Gyoles bridge. We crossed the track between two convoys — a pleasing tribute to Smiley's work — and, passing through a stretch of woodland, emerged into a broad meadow just as day was breaking.

In the meadow stood Ihsan's house, one-storied and white-washed, like many of the smaller country houses in Hungary. A light was burning in one of the windows; and, as we crossed the lawn, Ihsan Bey came out to welcome us. He led the way
764] indoors through mosquito curtains, for the plains are malarial; and we found ourselves for the first time in two months in a civilised room. There were armchairs and sofas; books and magazines lay on the table; pictures hung on the walls; and in a corner stood a luxurious radiogram. We stacked our submachine-guns and accoutrement of war beside it and sat

down, feeling distinctly out of place amid these comfortable 000
surroundings, with our unkempt hair, dirty uniforms, and heavy boots.

Ihsan Bey was still in his early thirties, a well-built and rather studious-looking man, dressed in a grey flannel suit with a white shirt open at the neck. He had studied in Vienna, and indeed might well have been an Austrian country gentleman from his small talk, the cut of his clothes, and the slightly German turn of his English sentences. An attentive host, he [574]
plied us in quick succession with tea, coffee, and a very potent *raki*, while we explained the purpose of our visit. Then, seeing that we were tired, he led us to our bedrooms, where clean pyjamas had been laid out. For the first time in months we slept between linen sheets and forgot the fatigues of the march in the delights of a spring mattress. It was after midday when we awoke to the comforts of modern lavatories and hot, scented baths; superfluous luxuries for a guerilla, but doubly welcome for their strangeness.

In the morning, while we still slept, Ihsan had driven into Tirana on our business. He returned about two o'clock, accompanied by Nureddin Bey Vlora, the friend of Count Carlo Frasso, our host at Brindisi, and by a younger man with a charming, French-speaking wife. Nureddin Bey was a son 186
of the Ottoman Grand Vizier, Ferid Pasha, and a nephew of Ismail Kemal, the founder of the first Albanian Republic. A great landowner in the region of Valona, he had been condemned to death, though later pardoned, for his part in the Fieri revolution against King Zog, and had long been one of the most influential supporters of the Republican Party. He was too great a patriot and too proud to "collaborate" with either the Italians or the Germans, but his counsels weighed heavily with the political leaders in Tirana, and especially with the Republican chiefs of the Balli Kombetar.

Still in his forties, Nureddin was fit-looking, debonair, and 000
very much a man of the world. He was dressed in a smart white suit and might just have stepped out of the casino at Mentone or the Mohammed Ali Club in Cairo. His English

000 was faultless and, with a sure understanding of the British character, he brought us whisky, for which he had combed Tirana, and excellent cigarettes made of Albanian tobaccos specially blended to his taste. At lunch the talk skimmed lightly from anecdotes to mutual acquaintances in the capitals of Europe; and, with the added charms of feminine company, the barriers of nationality and politics were seemingly dissolved by the pleasures of social intercourse. Such a gathering of Albanian landowners and British officers must have appeared to a Partisan observer as proof positive of the sinister machinations of international reaction. The thought passed through my mind, but I cannot pretend that it seriously diminished my enjoyment of the occasion.

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[726] When we had eaten, Ihsan took the other guests apart, and we remained alone with Nureddin. He told us at once that he had just been invited by the Germans either to assume the Premiership or to enter the Council of Regency. His natural instinct had been to decline the thankless task, but he would accept the responsibility if he could thereby assist the Allied cause. The idea of having a friend as head of the "collaborationist" government was certainly tempting and might offer opportunities for attacking the Germans from within. Nevertheless, we strongly advised Nureddin to refuse an invitation which might lead other Albanian Nationalists to line up with the Germans in an anti-Communist front. We then expounded our general policy, condemning collaboration in any form and stressing that we could only support those Albanians who fought against the Germans. We spoke, too, of our concern that the Ballists should be fighting with the enemy against the Partisans and appealed to Nureddin to use his influence with their leaders to bring about a change of policy. He told us that the Ballists would not only cease fighting the Partisans but would gladly co-operate with them against the Germans if only Enver Hoja would abandon his attempt to impose a social revolution on Albania by force. If we could restrain the L.N.C. he was confident that the Ballists would prove amenable; if we could not, then they must fight as best they could, for their lives and property were at stake.

Ihsan drove Nureddin back to Tirana in the afternoon and returned for dinner, bringing with him Midhat Bey Frasheri, the President of the Balli Kombetar. Midhat Bey had been in turn an official of the Sublime Porte, a member of the Committee of Union and Progress, and a powerful influence in the early struggles of the Albanian state. He had retired from public life under the monarchy, for he was a strong Republican, and since then had eked out his living from the proceeds of a bookshop. Steeped in the cultures of Europe and of the Near East, he was a man of austere ways, a romantic conservative, possessed of burning patriotism and a Catonian faith in the virtues of aristocracy. Now over seventy years old, he was a spare, straight figure, with determined yet sensitive features and a skin like parchment. On first acquaintance he seemed inordinately shy and was afflicted with a slight stutter. He was gifted, however, with a dry but sparkling wit, and his talk at dinner that night assured our entertainment and compelled our admiration.

When the meal was over we turned to grimmer topics. We bluntly accused the Balli Kombetar of "collaborating" with the Germans and threatened to denounce the movement and its leaders as enemies of the Allies unless they at once abandoned their fight against the Partisans. Midhat Bey was too honest to dissemble and answered that it was now too late. A revolution was in progress in South Albania in which the Communists, organised in the L.N.C., sought to overthrow the existing social order defended by the Balli Kombetar. Both movements had their origin in the resistance to the Italians, and at Mukai, in 1943, had concluded an alliance for joint operations against the Axis armies. The Ballists had been loyal to the alliance; but, after the Italian capitulation, Enver Hoja had attacked them, so that he should not have to share with rivals the prize of political power. This civil war had no connection with the struggle for National Liberation, which both parties had at first continued to prosecute. The Partisans, however, had shown themselves reckless of the cost of war to the civilian population and strong in the arms they received from the British. They had pressed hard upon the Ballists; and the

*669 latter, unable to sustain a war on two fronts, had been forced to suspend their attacks on the Germans that they might defend themselves against the Partisans.

It was regrettable that the civil war should have taken precedence over the war of Liberation, but it was not unnatural. The Germans were already beaten, and the Albanians could do little to hasten or retard their destruction. The outcome of the civil war, however, was still in doubt, and affected every aspect of the daily life of each Albanian. Nor could he really blame those Ballist leaders who, for particular actions, had accepted help from the German army. They had done so neither out of love for the Germans nor from any calculation that Germany might still win, but simply because men will adopt almost any expedient whereby they may prolong, even if they cannot hope to preserve, the enjoyment of life and property. The Partisans might still be fighting the Germans, but they did so on a small scale and solely so as to obtain arms and subsidies from the Allies with which to prosecute their revolution. Out of every hundred rounds which we sent them ninety would be fired against Albanians. He begged us, therefore, to restrain the Partisans, adding that if Enver Hoja would abandon the attempt to carry out a social revolution under the guise of patriotic resistance, then the Ballists would gladly join once more in the struggle against the Germans. The Ballists, he argued, were our friends; the Partisans were only agents of Russia. He urged us, therefore, to consult our imperial interests and not to sign away our influence in Albania for the sake of killing a few more soldiers of an army that was already beaten.

000 We sternly rejected his arguments lest any sign of sympathy from us should encourage the formation of an anti-Communist front. Nevertheless, we had to admit to ourselves that there was much truth in what he said. Those who, from a distance, observe the course of revolutions too often forget that in them there can be no neutrality. When a battle is in progress in a particular village or district no able-bodied man, let alone any man of influence, who is physically present, can avoid taking sides. Those who would seek to remain passive inevitably

arouse the suspicion or the greed of the combatants; and it is 000
only a question of chance whether they are shot as spies, murdered for their property, or killed by a stray bullet. In time of revolution, " He that is not with me is against me ".

Next day we enjoyed the comforts of Ihsan's house and expounded our inflexible opposition to an anti-Communist front to various lesser politicians who came out from Tirana to meet us. The rest of the time we spent in discussions with Ihsan and his cousin, Liqa, who was renowned as a hunter. Ihsan disapproved of blood sports but, since the *chasse à l'homme* was a frequent feature of Albanian country life, he kept two machine-guns, a mortar, and a stock of hand-grenades in his gun-room as a matter of course. In the house he carried only a light automatic, but when he drove to Tirana, or went for a walk, he armed himself with a Mäuser parabellum. Such precautions seemed incongruous in so civilised a man; but, if blood feuds were less common in the plain than in the mountains, the preventive assassination of opponents was a time-honoured method of government. It was interesting, indeed, to see how centuries of despotic rule had engrained the habits of conspiracy in the life of an Albanian country gentleman. One evening at dinner I heard what I thought was an owl hooting in the garden.

" It must be my cousin Liqa," said Ihsan, going to the French windows, " it is his call."

Sure enough it was.

We left Ihsan[1] by night and set out towards our base, 665
stopping in the mountains above Tirana to meet Jemal Herri. 625
Jemal had once been chief of Zog's secret police; and, along with Muharrem Bairaktar, Prenk Previsi, and Fikri Dine, had formed the quadrumvirate by whose efforts the royal regime had been established. Like his colleagues, he had fallen from favour, but had followed Zog into exile in 1939, returning to Albania in 1941 with Oakley-Hill and the forces of the United Front. Now he stood second to Abas Kupi in the Zogist movement and had built up a small but efficient force of his own,

[1] [i.e. Ihsan Toptani. Cf. cat. 116, p. 185--Analyst]

665 [625] stiffened by a handful of German deserters and fugitives from the labour gangs of the Todt Organisation. We had not previously met Jemal, for his relations with Abas Kupi were strained, and he had for some time been sulking in his tent. We knew, however, that he was in daily contact with Tirana and were anxious to enlist his support in disrupting the political manœuvres of the Germans.

[622] He[1] entertained us to lunch in the house of a village *hoja* and supplemented the usual hospitality of the mountains with highly spiced Yugoslav dishes specially prepared for us by his Bosnian mistress. In appearance he was a cross between Mussolini and Mephistopheles, with a powerful cast of face, ruthless yet somehow mask-like, malicious, and smooth. His violent temperament was curbed by iron self-control and disguised by an elaborate courtesy which might have seemed unctuous but for a hint of arrogance. In conversation he damned Abas Kupi with faint praise, seeking to drive a wedge between us and suggesting that we should send him supplies as an independent leader. We turned a guarded answer, but prevailed on him to send an urgent message to Fikri Dine, advising him to decline Neubacher's invitation to form a government.

000 In the afternoon Hare left for Shupal to persuade Abas Kupi to send a similar warning to Fikri. Meanwhile Maclean and I pressed across the valley and reached Bastar about midnight, only to find that Smiley had moved the camp. We therefore rode out along the range and, at 2 A.M., came on the new base, situated by the side of a gurgling stream on the edge of a broad, level clearing in the forest. We roused Smiley from his slumbers and when at last the flow of his curses had subsided he told us that he had good news: Headquarters had telegraphed approving the terms of our agreement with Abas Kupi. Now at last the revolt might begin.

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67 648 NEXT morning, the last of June, we reviewed our situation and judged it satisfactory. Headquarters had already ratified

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[1] [i.e. Jemal Herri, former chief of Zogist secret police -- Analyst]

our agreement with Abas Kupi; they now signalled that six 669*
'plane-loads of war material had been earmarked for our 648
Mission and were assembled in the hangars of the airfield at Brindisi. Meanwhile Merret had reported that the rear base had been set up in the mountains of Murait, to the east of Matsukull, and that he was standing by to receive air sorties. There was also a letter from Simcox confirming from personal experience that Gani Kryeziu's forces were in action against the Germans and requesting that we should reinforce him with another British officer and a wireless set. In five days' time we were due to meet the assembled Gheg leaders in the Plain of Lura, and now that Gani's example was seconded by our agreement with Abas Kupi we might look forward with confidence to the outcome of this meeting. Events seemed to be moving according to plan and we might hope that, within a few weeks, perhaps even a few days, the Ghegs would be up in arms.

Our immediate task was to decide the line we should adopt at the Lura meeting and we were thus engaged when Hare rode into camp from Shupal. We shouted to him the good news that our agreement with Abas Kupi had been approved, but he laughed ironically and called back:

"Too late! It looks as if he's had it."

He walked over to where we sat and explained that the First Partisan Division had driven the Zogists out of Shengyerg that night and had occupied the valley as far as Derye. Abas Kupi was concentrating his forces in Shupal and had sent warning to the Partisan commander that he would resist any attempt to penetrate further into his territory.

This news spelled the ruin of our hopes; civil war now ooo
seemed inevitable; nor was it any longer in our power to avert the tragedy. We had persuaded Abas Kupi to offer negotiation with the L.N.C.; we had brought him to attack the Gyoles bridge; we had agreed together the conditions on which he could take the field. Our part was done; and now only the Supreme Allied Command, or the hand of God, might still restrain Enver Hoja. These sombre reflections were still further darkened by forebodings of what lay ahead. Once

civil war began Abas Kupi would be unable to attack the Germans, and, if it were allowed to run its course, he must either be destroyed or driven in self-defence to accept their help. Then, through no fault of his own, he would be branded a "collaborationist" and we should be driven to break off relations with him. We were thus reluctantly brought to the conclusion that unless our Headquarters were prepared to exert the necessary pressure to prevent the civil war we should have to abandon the Zogist cause. In Greece British intervention had affected a temporary reconciliation between General Zervas and the E.A.M. In Yugoslavia the "collaboration" imputed to General Mihailovitch had served as a pretext for withdrawing the British Missions with his forces. We could not tell which of these examples would be followed in Albania; but, while the strategic importance of the Straits of Otranto might seem to commend the former, we feared that the prevalent policy of appeasing our Allies made the latter more likely of adoption. It was in any event our duty to prepare for the worst.

To abandon a man because he is the victim of circumstances must always be dishonourable; and the honour of a nation is inseparable from its prestige. As soldiers we were bound to obey orders whether we liked them or not; and behind the enemies' lines there could be no question of resigning. Nevertheless, if our Headquarters were committed to a policy which we knew to be dishonourable, it was still our duty to see that as little harm as possible was done to England's good name in carrying it out. Now there are degrees of dishonour; and it is a melancholy truth that, in politics, mistakes are more easily forgiven than weakness. From the beginning, therefore, we had determined that, if we should ever have to abandon Abas Kupi, it should not appear to be under pressure from the L.N.C. but of our own free will and for reasons consistent with our declared policy. To this end we had always stressed that, if the Zogists were overtaken by civil war before they attacked the Germans, our Mission would no longer be able to support them and might well be withdrawn. They understood this policy; and, though they must have

7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1

considered it tragically mistaken, we knew that they would not accuse us of weakness if we were now to break off relations with them. If, on the other hand, we stood by Abas Kupi in this crisis only to abandon him later, then it would be plain to all that the British Empire had yielded to the pressure of the Communist Party; a surrender which must destroy the confidence of our friends and excite the contempt of our enemies. We therefore advised our Headquarters that, unless they were prepared to take whatever steps might be necessary to stop the civil war, the time had come when our Mission might be withdrawn with the least loss of prestige. 000

669* We were still revolving these gloomy thoughts when, towards nightfall, Abas Kupi came into our camp with a force of some two hundred men. He was accompanied by Said Kryeziu and our Dibran friend Ramadan Kalloshi, who had come to accompany us to the meeting in Lura. The Agha greeted us calmly, but he looked tired and grim. He told us that the Partisans were still halted in Derye, but that they were only waiting for reserves to launch their main attack. He was convinced that they had learned of the agreement we had just concluded and that they had advanced against him with the deliberate intention of preventing its fulfilment. Now only the British could save the situation.

000 That night the moon shone bright as day; and, when the others had eaten and retired to sleep, I walked up and down for several hours between the groups of sleeping guerillas, discussing the future with Said and Maclean. Said was very distraught and criticised Abas Kupi for not trusting the British more whole-heartedly. He believed, however, that agreement could still be reached with the Partisans and was even prepared to go and parley with their leaders himself. The moon sank below the mountains while we talked and from behind the eastern ranges a new pallor crept into the sky. It would be dawn within an hour and, since the day would bring us much to do, we lay down to sleep where our blankets had been spread beneath the trees.

I was awakened by the sun shining on my face and saw from my watch that it was already past ten o'clock. Abas

000 Kupi and the Albanian leaders were sitting a few yards away, talking in low tones. We breakfasted together and then, to escape from the scorching heat of the summer's day, walked a few hundred yards into the forest which was cool like a cathedral. There we sat down in a circle — Abas Kupi, Said Kryeziu, Murad Basha, Ramadan Kalloshi, Maclean, Smiley, Hare, and myself. Maclean began by telling Abas Kupi that the provisional agreement between us had been ratified by our Headquarters and that the first consignment of arms was standing by at Brindisi. He feared, however, that Abas Kupi's decision might have come too late; for we could not send him arms which might be used in civil war. The British Mission with the Partisans would do all in its power to prevent the clash, but we suggested that meanwhile Abas Kupi should either launch a spectacular offensive against the Germans, or, if this was impossible, allow the Partisans to enter his region unopposed. Neither of these alternatives offered of itself a solution to the crisis; but the former might strengthen the hands of our colleagues in their negotiations with Enver Hoja, while the latter would at least gain time. We agreed that these were counsels of despair, but the situation was desperate; for, if civil war broke out before the Agha had attacked the Germans, our Headquarters might feel bound to reconsider their relations with him.

*669 Abas Kupi listened impassively and, after a long pause, replied that he could accept neither of our suggestions. He had agreed with us the conditions upon which he would attack the Germans, and from these he could not and would not depart. To attack the Germans equipped as he was would be to expose his movement to certain defeat; and if he was defeated there would be no one either to protect the tribesmen from German reprisals, or to prevent the triumph of Communism in Central Albania. Nor was he prepared to fall back and let the Partisans continue their invasion. He drew his strength from the men of Mati, Kruya, and Tirana and, if he allowed another to occupy those territories, his influence would disappear and his movement wither away. Besides, even if he wanted to, he could not prevent his followers from defending their homes and

MACLEAN AND ABAS KUPI IN CONFERENCE

While a bodyguard keeps a look-out through field-glasses

GLADE OF ZOGOLLI

The scene of our meeting with Abas Kupi and Muharrem Bairaktar

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ON THE WAY BACK FROM LURA

HOUSES BURNING DURING THE CIVIL WAR

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property against the Communists. Then, more in sorrow than in anger, he recalled the six years during which he had opposed the Axis Powers and spoke of all that we might still achieve together. But if, in spite of past friendship and future hopes, he was now to be abandoned as a Fascist, or a " collaborationist ", simply because he was attacked by the Communists, there was nothing more that he could do.

" We are soldiers," he said, " and will do our duty to the end. If you have to leave me, then God speed. Only tell your government that, if Enver Hoja attacks me, it is not because he thinks I am a Fascist but because he knows that I am the friend of the British."

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There was no more to be said and we returned in silence to the camp. There, while the midday meal was made ready, we drafted telegrams to our Headquarters, reporting developments and asking for instructions. The afternoon was spent in desultory discussion and at length it was decided that Hare should leave at dawn for Shengyerg to interview the Partisan leaders and try to gain time. He asked that Said might go with him, since he had many friends among the Partisans, but Abas Kupi would not agree, lest the tribesmen should think that Said had changed sides. Said indeed had openly taken the part [illegible] the L.N.C. in discussions with Abas Kupi and there was now coldness between the two men. From this time forward, therefore, Said became the guest of our Headquarters, so that his presence in Zogist territory should not implicate his brother, Gani, in the approaching struggle.

That night the threat of civil war hung over our heads like the sword of Damocles; and all of us seemed as if paralysed by a danger which we could no longer avert. Action and thought now gave way to passion; and a flood of anger and shame surged up inside me. After weeks of arduous journeys and patient negotiation we had mounted a revolt in North Albania and now, just before the zero hour, we were to be stabbed in the back by our own allies. We had laboured for nothing and now we were condemned to watch the Albanian resistance movement prostituted to the political ambitions of the Partisan leaders. How the Germans would laugh when

000 they knew what was afoot! I stopped and cursed myself for a fool: this resentment was puerile. No doubt the Partisans were the aggressors, but if their roles had been reversed Abas Kupi would have acted in much the same way as Enver Hoja. Appeals to justice and honour were notoriously the prerogative of the weaker side; and it was sheer sentimentalism to expect that the comradeship born in the hour of mortal danger should survive the approach of victory. The war had been a struggle for power and so would be the peace; and in Albania these things were settled by the sword. But if I could stifle my indignation I could not suppress my shame that the British Empire should be worsted in the game of power politics and its influence shot away with the very rifles and bullets we had ourselves provided.

×669 The night brought no news, and in the morning Hare set
648 out for Shengyerg to meet the Partisan leaders. We were due in Lura in three days, and it was time to decide what we should say to the Gheg chiefs. Our first instinct had been to cancel the meeting, lest the Partisans should consider it a provocation. On second thoughts, however, we decided that we should gain no credit from Enver Hoja for such a gesture of appeasement, while it was just possible that, if the Gheg leaders showed themselves united, he might hesitate to strike. Besides, we felt that it would be unworthy of us as British representatives to call off a meeting which we ourselves had summoned, in the faint hope of placating allies whom we could not control. If we had to break with Abas Kupi or any of the other Gheg leaders it were better that it should be done in public. We decided, therefore, to go ahead with the meeting and accordingly made arrangements to leave for Lura in the afternoon. In spite of the threat to his regions Abas Kupi agreed to come with us; and we were glad of the pretext for removing him from the scene of trouble.

That afternoon, when the mules had been saddled and the advance guard was already on the move, our wireless operator suddenly reported reception of a most urgent telegram. We called a halt and waited anxiously while it was deciphered. It was very short, stated categorically that no further supplies would be sent to the Partisans if they attacked the Zogists, and instructed us to find out what were now Abas Kupi's conditions for coming to terms with them. Our spirits rose at once; for this could only mean that our Headquarters had decided to intervene in Abas Kupi's favour, and that they were not prepared to lend themselves to a manœuvre which must subvert alike our military aims and our political interests in Albania. 669* 648

We consulted briefly with the Agha and telegraphed back to Headquarters that he remained ready to meet the Partisan leaders on two conditions. The first was that a British officer should be present throughout the conversations, so that we might see for ourselves which of the two parties was responsible if the talks ended in deadlock. The second was that the Partisans should recognise the Zogists as an independent movement. No definite proposals for agreement could be advanced until preliminary discussions had taken place, but we were convinced that Abas Kupi was genuinely anxious to come to terms with the Partisans. We suggested, however, that, if our Headquarters seriously contemplated promoting negotiations between the two parties, it would be wise to obtain suitable instructions for Abas Kupi from King Zog.

The business of deciphering the telegram from Headquarters and of enciphering and transmitting our reply had taken some considerable time. It was thus already late when Maclean, Smiley, and I set out with Said and a small bodyguard to catch up with Abas Kupi, who had gone ahead with the main body. Darkness overtook us as we crossed the range, but about midnight we found the Agha and his staff in the village of Gurre Madhe, on the south-western confines of Mati. There we stayed the night. 000

Next morning we set out to cross the Mati valley and in the full heat of the noon came to the river ford. The sun was scorching; the air still and laden with dust kicked up by the long line of marching men. Just above the ford was a deep pool, and with one accord the guerillas stripped and plunged into its ice-cool waters. We swam and sun-bathed for perhaps

600 an hour, and for a brief spell forgot the sweat of the march and the cares of the revolt.

Beyond the river we climbed to a low, stone keep, where we stopped for the midday meal. There we were presently joined by the chief men of Mati, including Dule Bey Allemani and Kaplan Bey Chelai, a brother of our friend, Yussuf Bey. All were downcast at the prospect of civil war, but their talk showed a pathetic trust that the British would still save the situation. We continued northwards in the afternoon and climbed steeply into the tangled mountains of Matsukull until we came to the village of Viniall. There we rested beneath a chestnut tree and watched the sun sink behind the mountains and the colours fade from the sky. The night was stifling hot, and in the distance we could hear wolves baying at the harvest moon.

We pressed on next day into the mountains, following a path which was flanked for some distance with cherry trees. They were already heavy with fruit, and each guerilla cut down a branch or two and ate the cherries as he walked. About midday we crossed the motor road which runs from Kruya to Dibra and entered the wooded massif of Murait on the southern marches of Lura. The path now led through cool beech forests; and, after two hours' march, we emerged into a grassland bowl some three thousand yards across, set between five rocky tors. The forests lapped it round, and to the north, where they spilled into the bowl, Merret had pitched his camp. Horses and mules grazed in the sunshine while a hundred or more guerillas rested beneath the trees. These were the men of Sul Kurti and other Zogist chiefs who had reached the camp the night before.

I lost the afternoon in sleep and woke to see the camp fires of the guerillas burning in the night. The wind had turned fresh and a light rain was falling. I walked over to where the others sat, but the wireless was silent and no couriers had arrived. There was no work to do and, after eating what was left of dinner, I went back to bed, still greedy for sleep.

669 Riddle and Hibbert, his assistant, rode in next morning from Dibra. They reported that the L.N.C. had entered the

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region from the south, while Macedonian Partisans were raiding across the border from the east. Riddle had also heard from Simcox that Gani Kryeziu could not come to the meeting and had asked that Said should deputise for him. Simcox had written that Gani was heavily engaged in the region of Bitutch, where the Germans had launched a drive against his headquarters. The courier had left while the fighting was still in progress, but Riddle had since heard that the Germans had withdrawn after burning down two villages, and that their communiqué, issued in Jakova, admitted to seventy casualties. We rejoiced at this news of fighting, but we knew that without a wireless set Gani could not be supplied with arms and that without arms his movement could not long endure. Accordingly, that same day, we sent Simcox a wireless set in the care of Bullock and Sergeant Collins, our most expert operator.

We set out from the camp in the afternoon and, towards sunset, found Abas Kupi encamped with some of the Dibran chiefs at the appointed meeting-place. This was in the glade of Zogolli, or the Birds — a strip of grassland not more than a hundred yards broad, but running for some miles through the forests. Fires had been lit, and the men were roasting whole sheep over the glowing embers. We sat down with the Agha on a log near one of the fires; bottles of *raki* were produced; and, while the spits were turning, old Sul Kurti told stories.

We slept that night under the trees, but I was woken early by the sound of men's voices. It was only seven o'clock, but Abas Kupi was already up and was sitting among his chiefs dictating letters to a secretary. A few of the men still slept, but most of them milled around the Agha, or stood talking in little groups. I roused Maclean, for something was clearly afoot, and we walked over to where the chiefs were sitting. There we learned that a courier had arrived an hour before with news that the Partisans had attacked and overrun the Zogist headquarters at Shupal. The civil war had begun in earnest.

We heard the news without surprise and were still discussing the prospects of successful British intervention when Islam Elezi — Mr. Can — and Sherif Lita arrived with a group of

669 chiefs from the north. They were followed an hour later by Muharrem Bairaktar, who rode in on his white mule with a strong bodyguard of well-armed Liuman tribesmen. Abas and Muharrem embraced; but Ramadan Kalloshi, who had mingled hitherto with the Zogist chiefs, now ostentatiously attached himself to the Lord of Liuma. This was a straw in the wind; and we saw that, though the chiefs sympathised with Abas Kupi, each of them still believed he could come to terms with the Partisans. Nor indeed were we interested in discouraging their lack of solidarity; for, though a common front against the Germans had been our aim, there was no place in our plans for a common front against the L.N.C.

000 The news of the Partisan attack had taken the life out of our meeting, but we sat down for a formal discussion beneath a tall and spreading oak: Abas Kupi, Muharrem Bairaktar, Said Kryeziu, Maclean, Smiley, and I. Meanwhile the lesser chiefs and their retainers stood around us in a ring. There could be no question now of calling for a general revolt of the Ghegs, but each of the leaders spoke in turn, deploring the outbreak of civil war and appealing to us to intervene and bring about a truce. Muharrem was holding forth with some eloquence on this theme when suddenly the heavens were darkened and a thunderstorm of apocalyptic violence transformed the glade of Zogolli into a blasted heath. The notables who stood around us scattered to seek shelter in the forests; and the six of us remained alone, clustered around the oak. Out of the storm there now appeared a haggard, wild-eyed figure, bearded and in rags. He stood amid the lightning and the rain, and shouted to us in shrill, staccato tones, foaming at the mouth and waving his arms like a windmill. We looked round, startled, and Muharrem paused in his speech and explained:

"He's shouting 'Long live England: let us fight the Germans.' Of course he's mad!"

"I wish he'd bite you all!" Smiley said in English.

Muharrem smiled, expecting a joke; but we forebore to translate.

The storm ceased as suddenly as it had begun and the wild man ran back into the woods. Presently a messenger 000 arrived from Merret's camp and handed Maclean a telegram.[1] 669* He read it and passed it to me. It was sent from Headquarters 648 and told us that a Major Smith would be dropped to us that night with proposals for effecting a reconciliation between the L.N.C. and the Zogists.

"The plot is just about ripe for a *deus ex machina*," Maclean remarked drily.

We told the leaders the news, and their spirits rose at once at the prospect of this dramatic, last-minute intervention. They had never quite believed that we would abandon them, and now they were convinced that the Smith Mission would soon put the Partisans in their place. All agreed to stay with us that night to hear what Smith might have to propose, and we therefore moved off in a body towards our base. There the thoughtful Merret had prepared an excellent dinner in honour of our guests, including trout dynamited in a near-by stream and four bottles of Italian champagne, procured in Dibra by his courier. The grim mood went from us, and the evening was enlivened by Abas Kupi's tales of his youthful exploits and Muharrem's more dubious reminiscences of the lighter side of exile in Paris. The most extravagant story of the evening was produced by Said Kryeziu. It concerned the disreputable activities of a great-uncle who, to escape from his creditors, his blood enemies, and the Turkish police, had solemnly committed suicide by drinking six bottles of brandy on end.

We lit the signal fires at midnight, and, by the light of the moon, saw the aeroplane almost as soon as we heard the drone of its engines. It circled once over the camp, then flew straight across the fires. Two parachutes opened and Smith and his operator swung down to earth. They landed safely, and, when they had extricated themselves from their harness and the embraces of the guerillas, we led them back to the camp fire for a hot drink.

Smith proved to be a solid young man with a shock of fair hair and a jutting chin. His manner was decidedly brisk and he looked very boyish, dressed in shorts and a thick pullover. He had been for some months a liaison officer with the L.N.C.

[1] [Following the Partisan seizure of Zogist Hqs. at Shupal -- [illegible]]

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and had only been evacuated from South Albania a few days before. From what he told us he was on excellent terms with most of the Partisan leaders, and he seemed to be well enough informed of the situation in the regions they controlled. His instructions were to propose an immediate armistice between the Zogists and the L.N.C., and to invite both sides to send delegates to Bari to confer with representatives of the Supreme Allied Commander.

" There," so he said, " we can knock their heads together and make them see sense."

He seemed uncertain exactly how the latter process was to be achieved, but brushed aside our suggestion that the Partisans were acting only too sensibly from their own point of view. At first sight it all seemed a trifle amateurish, but his instructions were confirmed in writing over the signature of Air-Marshal Elliot, and he told us that a reconciliation had just been achieved between General Zervas and the E.A.M. on similar lines. We concluded, therefore, that our Headquarters had decided to adopt a firmer attitude in dealing with the Partisans; and, since failure must be disastrous to British prestige in Albania, we presumed that they were prepared if necessary to enforce the solution which Smith was to propose.

In the morning Smith showed Abas Kupi his credentials in the form of a letter of recommendation from the Air-Marshal, and explained to him his proposals. The Agha at once agreed to the suggestion of an armistice and, after a moment's discussion with Said, accepted the invitation to a conference in Bari with the Partisan leaders. He offered to go there himself and asked that he might take with him two other delegates, one of whom would be Said. This choice was most welcome to us; for we knew that Said was a personal friend of many of the Partisan leaders and was genuinely anxious to come to terms with them. He was empowered, moreover, to represent his brother, Gani, and Muharrem Bairaktar, and so might also conclude agreements with the L.N.C. on their behalf.

Thus, in less than half an hour, Smith had secured Abas Kupi's assent to his proposals and had completed half of his mission. Our business was concluded; the Agha bade us

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farewell, and moved off with the leaders of Mati to organise the defence of his territories. The gathering now dispersed, and Muharrem with the other chiefs departed in turn to their several regions. The last to go was Islam Elezi, and we detained him to lunch for it was late. We discussed recent events together; and Maclean spoke reprovingly of the spirit of faction which rent the Albanians, saying that the Chiefs had only themselves to blame for their present plight. No doubt the English would still succeed in stopping the civil war but, as he roundly declared:

"None of this would have happened if you had only listened to me when I first told you to rise and attack the Germans."

Islam heard him in silence and answered:

"All that you say is true, Mr. Colonel, but you must remember that we Albanians are everything that is wicked: we are poor, we are ignorant, we are few."

V

CIVIL WAR

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> Il a été permis de craindre que la Révolution comme Saturne dévorât successivement tous ses enfants.
>
> PIERRE VERGNIAUD

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SMITH had accomplished the first part of his mission by obtaining Abas Kupi's assent to a truce and a conference on Allied soil. It was now necessary to its fulfilment that he should join the Partisan leaders and lay his proposals before them. We agreed, however, that he should forearm himself for this encounter by first learning what Hare might have observed, or concluded, in the course of his visit to the L.N.C. headquarters at Shengyerg. We therefore set out together from Murait on the afternoon of 7th July, intending to join Hare next day at our base on Mount Bastar.

It was already late when we started and, soon after nightfall, we lost our way on the thickly wooded slopes that lead down to the Mati valley. Exasperated by the snares and pitfalls of the forest, we had almost decided to sleep out on the mountainside when the moon rose from behind Mount Allemani and lighted us down to Dule Bey's stronghold. Dule himself had marched off at the head of his clan to join Abas Kupi, and we found no one in the keep but his womenfolk and two aged cousins. They received us, however, with traditional hospitality and, despite the lateness of the hour, insisted on preparing a meal for us. From their nervous gestures and excited voices we saw that they were afraid; and presently they told us that the Partisan advance guards had halted at sunset no more than two hours' march to the east.

We continued on our way in the morning, and, after an hour's ride, came on a group of Zogists taking up position on a low hill commanding one of the main tracks along the valley. Their commander was our old friend, Yussuf Bey Chelai, once the protector of the Mati Partisans, but now turned against them by their unprovoked invasion of the valley. Maclean with some difficulty repressed his professional urge to correct the siting of their one machine-gun, but the Chelai clansmen showed little sign of enthusiasm; and Yussuf Bey was plainly grieved that we should meet under such circumstances. 669*

"This fighting between Albanians is bad," he told us, "but we must defend our homes, for these men come as robbers, not as guests."

Despite the approach of battle Yussuf Bey did not forget the laws of hospitality; and while we talked together one of his men brought a pitcher of water and a basket of mulberries for our refreshment. We were touched by his courtesy, but soon took leave of him; for we did not wish to become involved in a fight with the Partisans. [574]

We pressed on, passing several groups of armed Zogists on the way, until about noon we reached the ford across the Mati. We could now hear the sound of shooting from the direction of the Chelai territory but, judging that it was still some distance off, halted and enjoyed a second bathe. An hour's march beyond the river brought us to the village of Gurre Madhe, at the foot of the mountains. There we stopped for the midday meal and sent out spies to watch the course of the battle. Sporadic rifle and machine-gun fire continued throughout the afternoon, and at length our spies returned to report that the Partisans were not more than half an hour away. Their strength was generally put at between one and two thousand men, and we were told that the quantity and quality of their equipment had excited the wonder and envy of the men of Mati. As yet there had been no serious engagement; for the defenders were but a few hundred strong, and only sought to delay the invasion while the main Zogist forces concentrated around Burrel.

We now climbed into the mountains on the last stage of the journey to our base. The light was beginning to fail but, *669 looking back, we observed tall pillars of smoke, shot with flame, rising from the far side of the valley. We trained our glasses on them and saw that several houses were on fire in the villages of Patin and Kurdari. Among them were the homes of our good friends Yussuf Chelai and of Dule Allemani, whose hospitality we had enjoyed only the night before. The Partisans were burning down the strongholds of the Mati *Beys*.

[648] We had hitherto somewhat innocently assumed that, as Allied officers, we should be allowed, and might even be obliged, to move freely between the contending parties to the civil war. Smith, however, now casually remarked that our Headquarters had accepted Enver Hoja's proposal that the Partisans should take any British officers they might "meet" in Zogist territory under their "protection". No word of this invidious agreement had reached us in our telegrams; and we stopped in our tracks, cursing the staff officers in Bari for their neglect of duty and Smith for his unseasonable reticence. Our base was less than two hours' march away, and for all we knew might already be occupied by the Partisans. We saw at once that our first care must be to avoid falling into their hands, since our capture would deprive Headquarters of all contact with Abas Kupi and might thus prove fatal to the success of the Smith Mission. Our first instinct was to turn back towards the valley, but night was already falling, and we were uncertain where the Partisans had halted. We stopped, therefore, in a lonely house on the side of the mountain, and despatched a messenger to reconnoitre the situation at our base and summon Hare to join us if he were still free.

The night was undisturbed, but our scout returned early next morning with bad news. The Partisans had been in possession of our base for two days; Hare had ordered his guards not to resist, and had been marched off with his wireless operator to the L.N.C. headquarters. Our kit and stores had been looted, our wireless set and war-chest removed. The 000 poor man wept with indignation as he told his tale and finally burst out:

"But you don't yet know the worst. The Zogist guards were disarmed and your officers led away by women! — By what they call anti-Fascist women!" 000

We now discovered that the L.N.C. offensive against the Zogists had taken the form of two parallel drives along the Shupal and the Mati valleys. The Partisans were thus divided by the range on which we stood; and their forces surged around its foothills like a rising tide about a rock. Our scout reported that they had already occupied the full extent of the Shupal valley; and we soon learned that their main body in Mati had passed through Gurre Madhe and was now engaged along the approaches to the Qaf Stamm pass. Our hopes of retreat were thus intercepted; and we were further admonished of the dangers of our situation by a report that the Partisans had sent out patrols to track us down. A panic fell upon the household, and our host came and begged us to be gone, protesting his loyalty but saying that he dared not hide us from the Partisans. We therefore bade Smith farewell; and, while he climbed on towards the Partisan lines, we moved off into the forests in search of a "hide-out" where we might set up our wireless and await the outcome of his negotiations or of the battle. 669*

All day we marched and counter-marched along the mountainside, but wherever we halted we were soon disturbed by the curiosity of wandering shepherds whose natural kindliness might too easily have been corrupted by the promises of the invaders. We spent a cold and hungry night on a windswept ridge, but, in the morning, came on a deep depression in the forest, sunk like a crater behind a projecting rib of the range. It was sheltered, thickly wooded and carpeted with fallen leaves, under which we presently discovered a spring of clear water. The mountain tracks were deflected away from its steep banks; and there was no sign that man or beast ever passed that way. There, for six days, we hid from our allies. 00

Besides Maclean, Smiley, Said, and myself our party now included Corporal Davis, a wireless operator whom we had borrowed from Riddle; fortunately, for Collins had gone to join Simcox, and Otter had been captured by the Partisans

000 with Hare. Davis was a quick-witted and amusing Hampshire lad, with the soft skin and delicate features of a girl. Desperately untidy and seemingly without method, he was yet a hard worker with a genius for improvisation. He would climb the most improbable trees to rig up his aerial and scattered his tools all over the camp; but, even in the most difficult moments, he never failed to " get through " to Headquarters: without him we could not have carried on. Abas Kupi once referred to him as "*Chuni*" — the youth — and to his intense annoyance the nickname stuck. Shaqir, our interpreter, was also with us, and a young Zogist liaison officer, as well as our bodyguards and mule-men. Altogether we were about a dozen strong.

Food was our first problem, for it is no easy task to keep a dozen men alive in a forest when every village is in hostile hands. Gold, however, like water, corrodes most obstacles in time; and, after a day's fast, we won to our cause a young shepherd who was to procure for us a daily sheep from his father's flocks and an occasional loaf of bread or lump of cheese. Prudence as well as scarcity, however, enjoined on us a form of Ramadan; and we ate only at night, lest the smoke of our fires be seen above the trees and betray our presence.

* 669 Next in importance to food was news; and each day we sent a scout to spy out the land and pick up the gossip of the nearest villages. Mati was full of rumours, but all suggested that the Partisan offensive had been held by Sul Kurti between Matsukull and Qaf Stamm, and that Abas Kupi was preparing a counter-attack from Kruya. Meanwhile the men of Mati, who had at first been very reluctant to take up arms, discovered a fierce resentment against the Partisans. Their pride had been wounded by the burning of their chieftains' strongholds; and they were more directly injured by the efforts of the Partisans to introduce conscription and commandeer their rifles and their food. Communist propaganda, moreover, failed to " take " among them; and they came to regard the advance of the Partisans as an invasion of Tosk outsiders — rumour even had it that there were Serbs and Greeks among them — whose interests and way of life could not be reconciled with

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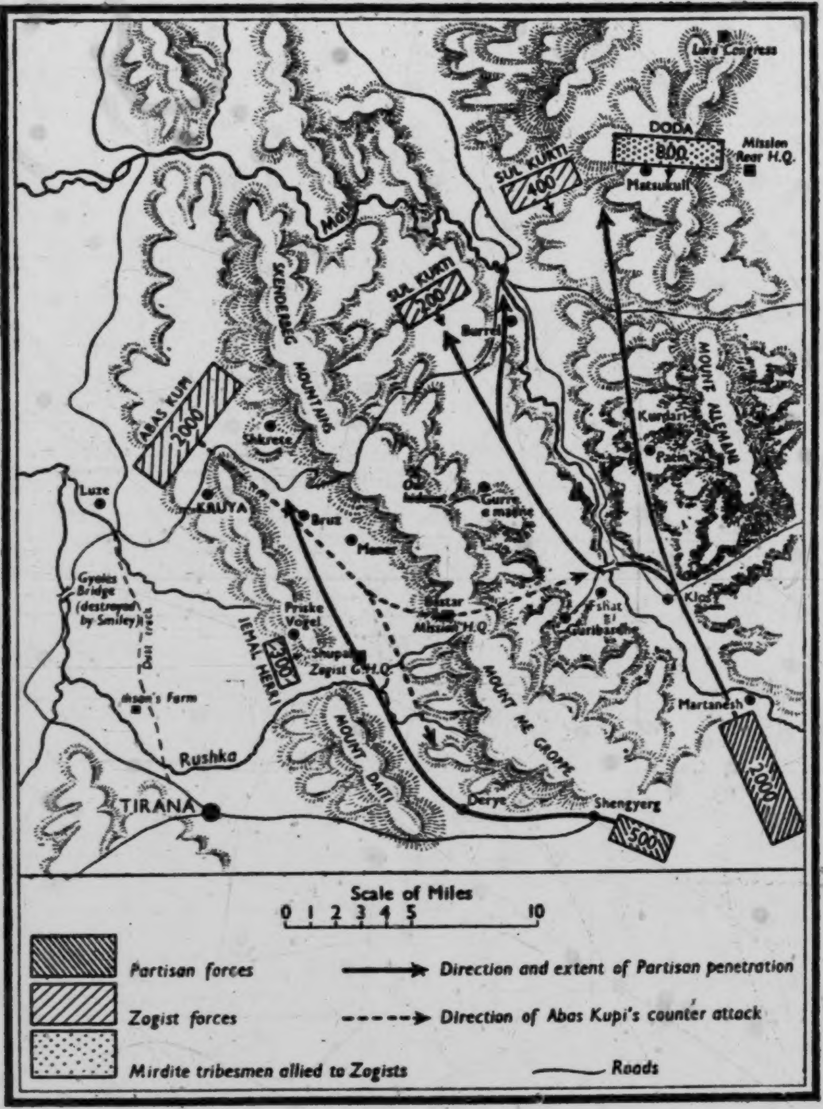
Lura Congress
DODA
800
Mission Rear H.Q.
SUL KURTI
400
Matsukull
Mat
SKENDERBEG MOUNTAINS
SUL KURTI
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Burrel
MOUNT ALLEMANI
Kurdari
Pasin
ABAS KUPI
2000
Shkrete
Luze
KRUYA
Bruz
Manez
Gurre e madhe
Gyoles Bridge (destroyed by Smiley)
Dirt track
Priske Vogel
JEMAL HERRI
300
Shupal
Zogist G.H.Q.
Bastar
Mission H.Q.
Fshat
Guribardhe
Klos
Ihsan's Farm
MOUNT DAITI
MOUNT ME GROPPE
Martanesh
2000
Rushka
TIRANA
Derye
Shengyerg
500
Scale of Miles
0 1 2 3 4 5 10
Partisan forces
Zogist forces
Mirdite tribesmen allied to Zogists
Direction and extent of Partisan penetration
Direction of Abas Kupi's counter attack
Roads

Sketch Map showing Operations during First Partisan Campaign against Abas Kupi, 29th June to 27th July 1944

211

[-[redacted]-]

*UA their own. As a result the Partisans met with singularly little co-operation from the local inhabitants; and every night a handful of men slipped through the lines to join Abas Kupi's forces.

000 Besides the daily search for food and news we spent the time listening to the distant sounds of the battle, and revolving the problems of our mission. Also, as men will in periods of prolonged tension, we discussed our most cherished ambitions and intimate beliefs, as if the presence of danger impelled us at least to express what we might never achieve. Our only books were a battered copy of *Manon Lescaut* and Laski's *Reflections on the Revolutions of Our Time.* The tribulations of the Chevalier des Grieux were touching by their contrast with our own: the Professor's theories were stimulating, but we could not help thinking that a closer acquaintance with " the Dibran mentality " might have informed them with a less hopeful spirit.

The sunless days passed slowly, enlivened only by the distant crackle of rifle fire, the stuttering of machine-guns and the histrionic bursts of mortar bombs. The nights which succeeded them were cold, especially in the hour before dawn; and we slept wrapped in our overcoats on heaps of bracken banked up beside the fire. To have hidden from the Germans would by comparison have been easy; for they were regular soldiers in a strange land and afraid, as the hunter is afraid when he senses that he is being stalked by his own quarry. The Partisans, however, were guerillas as we were, and knew our tactics by self-examination. Our " hide-out " could not by its very nature be guarded; and we were never sure when we might not wake to find that a silent enemy had crept through the pathless forest and surrounded us. We were, besides, under orders not to resist capture; and the morale of our escort was emasculated by the knowledge that, in the last resort, they might not even shoot their way out or sell their lives dearly. For us this was of small importance, since we assumed that we had nothing to fear from the Partisans. Our bodyguards, however, were less sanguine of their prospects and had lost faith in our power to protect them.

Such a situation was as invidious as it was uncomfortable; for we were reduced to these straits not by our enemies the Germans, but by our allies the Partisans. In the course of our journeys through Mati we had often praised Enver Hoja's loyal co-operation with our Missions, and had held up the Partisans as an example to the Zogists. The mountaineers had thus come to believe that the L.N.C. was under British influence; but now they saw that these were men who knew us not. They set fire to the homes of the Zogist leaders who had befriended us; they denounced us in the villages as "agents of foreign reaction"; and they even threatened to bring us to trial before an L.N.C. court-martial. Once they even captured a young mule-man whom we had sent out to look for food and thrashed him unmercifully to make him disclose our whereabouts. The youth refused to betray us and, escaping from his guards, returned to us with a bloody back. We rewarded his injuries, but in the eyes of the men of Mati, and not least of our bodyguards, the prestige of his masters was measured by the treatment of their servant.

There are few contrasts so sharp as those produced by the loss of power. So long as Abas Kupi had swayed the valley we had everywhere been honoured in our persons and assisted in our needs; for we were accredited to his movement. Now power had passed into the hands of the L.N.C., and we experienced all the dissolving influences of adversity. Food prices rose, the surest indication of our distress; and the cost of a sheep increased from one to four gold napoleons. Fear overtook our escort and, skulking in the forest, their morale ebbed away. Couriers we sent out did not always return. One of our bodyguards deserted; another refused to cross the valley with Smiley in an attempt to reach our rear base at Murait. The wonder is only that we were not betrayed. But in this, as in all crises, the young were our best friends; for, having nothing to lose but their lives, they still identified their interests with their honour. Besides, Zogist sentiment was strong; the issue of the battle was uncertain; and the men of Mati were perhaps reluctant to kill the goose which laid the golden eggs.

2

169 We had gone into hiding with the wishful hope that Smith might persuade the Partisans to a temporary truce and so enable us to rejoin Abas Kupi in safety. We therefore followed closely the progress of his negotiations as reported to us in telegrams from Headquarters. These informed us that Smith had come on a group of Partisans soon after leaving us and had been escorted by them to the village of Klos in the Mati valley. There he had found Mehmet Shehu, who was in charge of the operations against the Zogists, and my friend, Mustafa Jinishi, who accompanied the army as a special delegate of the Partisan provisional government. They had given him a friendly hearing, but had declined to take responsibility for so grave a decision, and had sent him on to the headquarters of the First L.N.C. Division in Dibra, two days' march away. Its commander, Dali Ndreu, a nephew of the Dibran chief, Tsen Elezi, had applied to Enver Hoja for instructions, and, after a further two days' waiting, Smith had been sent south to Berat, the seat of the provisional government. Our hopes of an early release sank with each delay and were finally dispelled by the news that Enver Hoja had rejected out of hand all proposals for a truce or for negotiations with the Zogists.

We knew now that there was no likelihood of an early end to the civil war and therefore made up our minds to escape from a dangerous and uncomfortable isolation. Every day that we remained in the forest increased the chances of our discovery, while, as fugitives behind the Partisan lines, we could neither influence events nor even accurately observe them. It was, besides, our duty to join Abas Kupi as soon as we could, to report on his circumstances, and to be ready to act on whatever instructions we might now receive from Headquarters. These, we felt, could not be long delayed; for we were convinced, despite the apparent failure of the Smith Mission, that our Headquarters would not give up their efforts to stop the civil war.

To escape out of the forest seemed no easy matter, for we were surrounded on all sides. One man might indeed creep through the L.N.C. lines at night without too great difficulty; but our wireless equipment could only be carried on mule-back, and this would hold us to the paths and make our progress conspicuous and slow. We therefore decided that Maclean should stay behind with the wireless for the time being and keep in touch with Headquarters. Meanwhile Said and I would try to join Abas Kupi and would then send back for Maclean when we knew where his mules could safely pass through the Partisan positions. Smiley, for his part, was to make his way to our rear base at Murait. There he would find another wireless set and might maintain our Mission in being if the rest of us should be captured by the Partisans.

Accordingly, on the afternoon of July 13th, Said, Smiley, and I slipped away from our hide-out, accompanied each by a single bodyguard. We rode silently through the forest and, an hour before sunset, approached the Qaf Stamm pass, over which runs the motor road to Kruya. The evening was warm and still; and, for the first time for many days, there was no sound of firing from the valley. The pass had several times changed hands in the recent fighting; and, judging that the front line must be near, we sent a scout ahead to reconnoitre the Partisan positions. Meanwhile we rested in a meadow and enjoyed the wild strawberries which grew there as thick as the grass.

Our scout returned at nightfall and reported that the Partisans still held the lower stretches of the road, but had withdrawn from the pass itself that afternoon. We pressed on, therefore; struggled a thousand feet up a slope so steep that our mules could scarcely manage the ascent, and at last came out on to the Qaf Stamm road. This road, a notable feat of Italian engineering, was cut along the face of the mountain above a boulder-strewn ravine. The night was black as pitch, and for a long time we could find no break in the cliff face where we might lead the mules off the road and on to the slopes above. Twice Smiley's mule was dragged successfully up narrow clefts; but both times my less agile beast and Said's horse became wedged between the rocks and, to Smiley's disgust, had to be pulled back on to the road. Had there still been guards on the pass we must have abandoned our mounts or been killed. As it was, after nearly two hours' search, we found a steep gully which men and beasts successfully negotiated. This brought us out into a tangle of brambles and shrub where, after a vain but exhausting effort to find the path, we lay down and slept.

*669

In the morning we looked out of the thicket and saw that we were scarcely two hundred feet above the road. No one was astir, and, climbing over the brow, we made our way down to a farm-house which stood by the banks of the Lysa, a tributary torrent of the Mati. There we learned that we were in no-man's-land; for, though the Partisans had withdrawn from the neighbouring village the day before, the Zogists had not yet returned. Smiley now left us to try and cross the Mati valley, while Said and I marched south-westwards in the direction of Kruya. We could obtain no certain intelligence of the dispositions of the L.N.C., and so, avoiding the main path, crossed the Skanderbeg range by a little-known track. This was so devious, rough, and overgrown, that we soon understood its unfrequentedness. We climbed all day, and towards evening made our way down to the village of Shkrete, just beyond the range. We halted outside the village and sent a scout ahead, who presently reported that we were once more in Zogist territory. We continued, therefore, to the house of Abas Kupi's local representative and at once despatched a courier to the Zogist headquarters to announce our arrival. We had eaten nothing but a little cheese since the previous afternoon, but our hunger was now appeased by a roasted sheep; and we celebrated our deliverance in copious draughts of a potent *raki*.

It was near noon when we woke to find that an escort had already arrived to conduct us to Abas Kupi. We set out, therefore, after the midday meal, and, marching southward along the western face of the Skanderbeg range, came on the Agha halted by the Qaf Stamm road. Upwards of a thousand guerillas lay smoking on the grass; and we were surprised to see that some of them were eating small loaves of wheaten bread. Five commercial lorries were drawn up beside them, 669* but the leading one had blown up on a land-mine and its front wheels and radiator were shattered and twisted. Abas Kupi came to meet us and embraced us warmly, expressing his relief to see us safe and sound. Half a mile away, from the head of the pass, came the sound of rifle and machine-gun fire.

The Zogist counter-offensive had begun that morning: and the Agha now explained to us that he intended to re-occupy the Shupal valley and descend over the Qaf Murresit into Mati to outflank the Partisans. He parried most of my questions and presently we left the road to climb with the guerillas to the head of the Shupal valley. There we found Murad Basha and Dule Allemani with an advance guard of some five hundred men, grouped just below the crest of the watershed. From the crest itself a few snipers were harassing the retreat of the Partisans. The latter soon withdrew out of range; and an hour later, with forces which amounted to fifteen hundred men, Abas Kupi reoccupied the village of Bruz. There we were lodged for the night, in the same house where I had first met Petrit three months before.

The morale of the Zogists was high; and their chiefs had been much encouraged by a speech in the Albanian transmission of the B.B.C. made by General Percy, the former Inspector-General of the Albanian gendarmerie. The General had condemned the Partisan attack against Abas Kupi, and his words, taken in conjunction with the Smith Mission, had convinced the Zogist leaders that they could count on British support. The talk that evening was livelier than usual, and 522 Murad Basha indulged in sallies against the reactionary influence of the *Beys* and *Aghas* with pointed references to Abas Kupi and Said. They riposted with a joke typical of Albanian humour and which was kept up for several weeks. Among the chiefs was a kindly but simple young man whose brother had been killed some years before when a bomb with which he had gone out fishing had exploded in his hand. The bomb had apparently been given him by Murad Basha; and Abas Kupi now represented to the young man with the utmost gravity that he was in honour bound to avenge the injury. The

522 youth at first took it all in earnest; Basha looked hotly embarrassed; and the assembled company laughed till their sides ached. Later in the evening a more pathetic note was struck by Dule Bey, when I condoled with him over the burning of his home.

"I had no right," he said, "to expect that my house would escape destruction when so many great cities all over the world are bombed every day. But I had hoped that it would be burnt by the Germans whom I intended to attack and not by fellow Albanians."

669 From Bruz I had sent couriers to Maclean, who joined us next afternoon with Davis and the wireless set. He made the journey without difficulty; for the Partisans were in full retreat and their rearguards had already lost touch with the Zogist van. We slept that night in Mener, a village two hours' march further down the valley, and in the morning received a disturbing report from Smiley that German troops had appeared on the Mati front near Burrel. We at once informed Abas Kupi and told him bluntly that any "collaboration" between his men and the Germans must prove fatal to our relations. He showed concern rather than surprise at the news, and, after some discussion, wrote to Sul Kurti, ordering him to avoid all contact with the Germans and to withdraw his men from any sector where they might appear.

The Agha now marched off to direct the reoccupation of Shupal, but we remained at Mener, preparing a report for Headquarters. Smiley joined us there next day, the 19th July, after finding it impossible to cross the Mati valley. That same afternoon a courier came from Tirana with the news that Fikri Dine had accepted the premiership and had persuaded a number of influential men hitherto unsuspected of "collaboration" to join his government.

The presence of lorries with the Zogist forces, the sudden abundance of white bread, the arrival of German troops in Mati, and now the news that Fikri Dine had taken office, all suggested that Neubacher had at last succeeded in creating the very anti-Communist Front which we had worked hard, and for a time successfully, to prevent. The situation of the Zogists grew each day more compromising; but before deciding on a course of action we set ourselves the task of finding out just what had happened in the time that we had been hiding in the forest.

3

THE Partisans had launched their offensive against Shupal on the 5th July, when Abas Kupi, with many of his chiefs, had been two days' march away in Lura, at the congress of Gheg leaders called by our Mission. Murad Basha, who had been left in command at Shupal, had been present at our discussions when civil war had first threatened and had heard us urge the Agha to withdraw his forces rather than resist the L.N.C. The memory of our arguments had only increased his natural indecision; and, when the Partisans attacked, he had abandoned the headquarters without making more than a show of resistance. Verily, " if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? "

Abas Kupi had received the news of the attack on the morning of the 6th July, but had delayed in Lura until the next day to meet Smith. It was thus not until the evening of the 7th July that he had joined the main body of his forces near Burrel. By this time the Partisans had already occupied the whole of the Shupal valley and half of Mati, thus depriving him of much of his territory and manpower. The remaining Zogist forces in Mati amounted to less than a thousand men and were thus too weak to drive back the Partisans, who were nearly twice as numerous, besides being more disciplined and better armed. The Agha had therefore left Sul Kurti to bear the brunt of their attack as best he could, and had hastened across the Qaf Stamm pass to raise the men of Kruya for a counter-offensive.

He was thus engaged when, on the night of 11th July, Mustafa Kruya, Mark Joni Markai, and Fikri Dine came out from Tirana to meet him. For months they had failed to come to terms, but now the Partisan invasion of Central Albania had aroused in them a sense of common interest such as the Germans

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had laboured in vain to instil. In the face of a mortal danger their former differences were forgotten and they determined to combine in self-defence against a common enemy. What passed between them that night has never been disclosed, but the subsequent course of events indicated the broad lines of the division of labour on which they then agreed.

Mark Joni Markai raised his clansmen for the defence of Mirdita, while his cousin, Doda Bairaktar, with forces drawn from its three southern *Bairaks*, marched to the relief of Mati. Doda found old Sul Kurti hard pressed around Matsukull, and his timely arrival enabled the Zogists to deliver an unexpected counter-attack and thus to check the further advance of the Partisans.

Fikri Dine organised the defence of Dibra, where his influence was strong, and then assumed the premiership of the " collaborationist " government. His object was to mobilise all the resources of the Albanian state for the struggle against the Partisans and to enlist the active support of the Germans.

Abas Kupi raised some two thousand men in Kruya province, and a further thousand in Shiyak, and advanced with these to reoccupy the Shupal valley. Thanks no doubt to Mustafa Kruya's intervention, his men could now move safely in the plain; and the " collaborationist " authorities turned a blind eye on their visits to Tirana. The Zogist Committee therefore hired a number of lorries in the capital, in which Abas Kupi rushed his forces to the head of the Qaf Stamm pass. Likewise they organised a regular supply of wheat bread from the Tirana bakeries to supply the Zogist forces. Finally, while Fikri Dine sought German help to end the civil war by force, Abas Kupi sought British help to end it by negotiation.

Mustafa Kruya's part in this strange coalition was to persuade the Germans to back Fikri Dine with arms and money, and to see that they connived at such support as Abas Kupi might receive from his Committee in Tirana. It is possible that the German troops which appeared in Mati were sent there on his advice. It seems more likely, however, that this was an independent manœuvre of the Germans, designed to compromise Abas Kupi in the eyes of the British and so bind him more closely to his " collaborationist " associates.

This compact between Abas Kupi and the "collaborationists" was a logical outcome of the civil war. The Zogists had been attacked by the Partisans; their military situation was critical; and, without some outside help, Abas Kupi could not hope to recover his lost territories or even to hold Kruya. Yet, unless he held his ground his cause was lost; and in the absence of British support he had no choice but to turn to more dangerous friends. It was a matter for concern that he should be working with "collaborationists", but to fight a private war with the help of the enemy's friends was not of itself intentional, or even objective "collaboration". The political morality of Albania made more allowance for expediency than that of Western Europe; nor in the nature of things could there be the same bitterness between the supporters and opponents of the Axis as in more developed countries. The ideologies of Liberalism, Fascism, or Communism could not be deeply felt among the Albanian tribes; for Albania was still a country where a man took sides in politics less to express a preference than to place a bet. Nevertheless, the Agha was sailing very close to the wind; and we feared for the future. Was he after all "to go the way of General Mihailovitch"?

4

FROM Mener Abas Kupi pursued his advance with Fabian caution, and, knowing that the tribesmen would not long endure casualties, consistently refused to engage the main body of the Partisans. Instead he shepherded them out of the valley by a sequence of outflanking movements, made irresistible by his superior numbers and possession of the high ground. On the 18th July the Zogist forces re-entered Shupal, the former seat of their General Headquarters; and on the following day the Agha reached Bastar, the village which had guarded the southern approaches to our original base. That evening the last Partisan rearguards withdrew over the Qaf Murresit into Mati, thus abandoning the whole of the Maltsia Tirana as far as Shengyerg.

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Maclean and I had remained two days in Mener, engaged in the drafting and despatch of telegrams to our Headquarters. It was therefore not until the evening of the 19th July that we reached Bastar, where we joined Abas Kupi and his staff in the house of the village *hoja*. There we learned that he planned to lead his men into Mati next day to threaten the left flank of the Partisans and so quicken their withdrawal before Sul Kurti, who was advancing against them from Burrel. Sul Kurti and his confederates now disposed of some two thousand men, while the Zogist forces under the Agha's immediate command numbered a further fifteen hundred. These were increased next day by the arrival from Shiyak of five hundred well-armed bashibazouks, commanded by Musa Pitsari, a wealthy but adventurous merchant whom Abas Kupi now entrusted with the defence of the Shupal valley. In addition to these forces there were smaller Zogist bands around Shengyerg and on the Qaf Stamm pass; and communications with Tirana were safeguarded by Jemal Herri, with some three hundred rifles. Thus, although many of his supporters were still in the territories under Partisan occupation, Abas Kupi had succeeded in raising some four thousand men; a force which outnumbered his assailants by nearly two to one, and, incidentally, confirmed our earlier estimate of his strength.

The wildest rumours were current in Bastar: one report had it that the Partisan General, Mehmet Shehu, had been killed; another that Billal Kola, the doughtiest of the Mati chieftains and a brother of our interpreter, Halit, had been fatally wounded. The most notable event, however, which marked the army's sojourn in the village, was the capture of two Partisans, the first prisoners of the campaign. They were both quite small boys, twelve and ten years old, and had fallen out during the retreat from Shupal, exhausted by hunger and lack of sleep. By the time we saw them they had both eaten and rested and, though still rather sheepish, were quite ready to make friends. Their talk was full of Communist jargon; and they told us that it was nearly a year since they had run away from their homes, near Valona, to join the Partisans. Both claimed to have seen action against the Ballists and the

Germans; and the younger boy gave us a graphic description 669* of a raid in which he had wounded a German corporal in the stomach and "finished him off" by shooting out his eyes at point-blank range.

I was spellbound by the child's detailed and exultant 000 account of how he had killed the grown man: an awful example of the Nemesis which by many and devious ways was everywhere overtaking the German conquerors of Europe. At the time I applauded the deed, in part perhaps *pour encourager les autres*; but the tribesmen, more human in that their values were solely individual, shook their heads and condemned the Partisans for dragging children into a struggle which they could not understand. Abas Kupi talked kindly to the two boys and, after keeping them for a day with his bodyguard, arranged to send them back to their homes. The recruiting of children for war or revolution will be variously admired or deplored; the fact remains that the enthusiasm and devotion of such boys — and there were many of them in the ranks of the Partisans — were of no small account in deciding the success of the Albanian revolution.

We had some talk with Abas Kupi before he began the 669* advance into Mati, and referred to his recent understanding 648 with Fikri Dine and Mustafa Kruya, brutally reminding him of the fatal results that would attend any similar accommodation with the Germans. He sullenly denied any act, or even thought, of "collaboration" with the enemy, and countered our charges with the accusation that we were again dropping supplies to the Partisans. This we rejected as impossible; for our Headquarters had informed us, and Smith had confirmed, that no arms would be dropped to either side so long as the civil war continued. The tone of the conversation became increasingly unfriendly; and the exchange of accusations only served to reveal the mistrust which had invaded our relations. We knew, however, that our Headquarters were gravely concerned by the news that German troops had appeared in Mati, and by the reports of Abas Kupi's "collaboration" which they were continually receiving from the Partisans. We

*669 believed, therefore, that it was only by speaking our minds with
648 perhaps exaggerated bluntness that we could hope to offset the pressure from Tirana and so keep the Agha to the straight and narrow path. In the event our efforts were rewarded; and before he left for Mati Abas Kupi undertook not to pursue the Partisans beyond his regions.

Our immediate aim was still to bring Abas Kupi and Said Kryeziu to Bari to meet our staff officers and the newly appointed Partisan delegates. Enver Hoja indeed still refused to agree to negotiations, but it seemed just possible that he might prove more willing to come to terms if Abas Kupi now defeated the Partisans in Mati. Our task meanwhile was to overcome the physical obstacles which stood in the way of his journey to Italy. This must be made by air or sea; and, while our submissions were instructed to reconnoitre possible landing grounds for aircraft, Smiley went down to the coast in search of a suitable embarkation point.

000 Davis, our wireless operator, now reported the breakdown in a vital part of the engine with which the batteries of our transmitter were charged. Our communications with Italy were thus threatened with early interruption; and Maclean accordingly left with Said for a village near Tirana to try and arrange for the necessary repairs. Meanwhile I was to remain with Abas Kupi and observe the course of his offensive against the Partisans.

I spent the 21st July in Bastar, for I was feverish and my throat swollen. There, towards evening, I heard the news of the attempt on Hitler's life — an incident which was sure to impress the Albanians and which I at once reported to Abas
*669 Kupi as evidence that the end was near. Next day brought little improvement in my condition and, learning that the Zogist troops were not even in contact with the Partisans, I determined to delay my departure till the following morning. That same afternoon, however, I was awakened from a troubled sleep to learn that the Partisans had launched a counter-attack from Shengyerg and were less than an hour's march away. Still weak with fever, and riding a very old, white horse, I made

my way towards the Qaf Murresit, accompanied by Shaqir, Kolaver, and a mule-man. At the head of the pass I found a score of anxious-looking Zogist guerillas, and learnt from their leader that they were all that now remained of the garrison of the valley, Musa Pitsari having marched off that morning with his whole force to attend to some private feud in Shiyak. The young Zogist officer seemed to think that the Partisan attack was only a raid in strength, but admitted that his men were far too few to offer any effective resistance. Despite my repeated protests he insisted on escorting me down into Mati; but, though he chivalrously invoked his concern for my safety as his motive, I could not help suspecting that he and his men welcomed an honourable pretext for withdrawing from an exposed position.

My horse stumbled along so slowly that at last I dismounted and, leaving Kolaver to lead the beast, walked ahead with the guerillas. The exercise did me good, and I presently forgot my ailments in my efforts to cheer up Shaqir. That good fellow had some cause for gloom, for a cousin of his had been seriously wounded in the L.N.C. counter-attack; and he feared for his house in Shengyerg and for his family, who were once more in the power of the Partisans.

Two hours' march brought us to Guribardhe, an important village commanding the main road to Martanesh. There I found Hamsa Drini, seated on the steps of a fountain outside the mosque, arranging with the village elders for a distribution of bread to his troops. Hamsa was a large man with big red hands, a small head, and plain, honest features. A native of Dibra, he looked more a peasant than a mountaineer and was perhaps of partly Slav extraction. He had been a major of gendarmerie and had only recently joined Abas Kupi, who prized his courage and powers of organisation. He seemed untroubled by the news of the Partisan raid into Shupal, but was obviously depressed by the total lack of organisation and wretched equipment of his troops.

" The Agha," he told me, " may win the campaign by outmanœuvring Mehmet Shehu, but God help us if it ever comes to a stand-up fight."

000 I asked Hamsa for guides to take me to Abas Kupi, and, learning that he was leaving himself for the Zogist headquarters, gladly fell in with his suggestion that we should make the journey there together. We waited until it was dark, for the paths leading from Guribardhe were still under fire from the Partisans, and then set out along a broken mountain track with a force of some three hundred men. An hour's trudge brought us down to the main road, cut, for a stretch, along the face of a cliff and offering neither cover nor escape. We marched, I thought rather imprudently, at the head of the column; and Hamsa was expatiating in voluble Serbian on the future of Anglo-Russian relations when suddenly a challenge rang out in the night. He seemed not to hear it and, evidently engrossed in his train of thought, continued to develop his argument. The sentry's voice sounded again. This time Hamsa stopped and, scratching his head, muttered:

" My God, I've forgotten the password ! "

Almost at once there was a burst of submachine-gun fire, at perhaps forty yards' range. We flattened ourselves on the road, or scrabbled vainly for protection against the cliff, while a hail of bullets, some of them tracer, whined past our heads and ricochetted against the rocks. We knew that our assailants were only a Zogist patrol, but it was some time before our shouts prevailed above the shooting and we were released from a most uncomfortable situation. By a miracle only one man was wounded. The leader of the patrol now courteously reminded us of the password, and we were allowed to resume our march. A man's courage varies with the nature as much as the extent of a danger; and I observed that night that the same Albanians who had literally turned grey with fear when we had lain surrounded by the Partisans, remained apparently unconcerned in what, to me, seemed far more trying circumstances.

Our guides had assured us that the Zogist headquarters were only two hours distant from Guribardhe. They lost the way, however, several times; and we had been nearly five hours on the march when at last we reached the house where Abas Kupi and his staff were lodged. I found the Agha just going to bed in a room thickly strewn with the sleeping bodies of the Zogist chieftains, many of them lying half-naked in the stifling summer night. The master of the house had already retired; and, after drinking a bottle of beer which the resourceful Kolaver had unaccountably produced from a sleeping village, I gladly accepted Abas Kupi's offer of a share of his mattress. 000

669*

I was woken next morning by the rattle of machine-gun fire, punctuated by the occasional slap of a bullet against the stone wall of the house. The guest-room was empty and, going downstairs to investigate, I found Hamsa Drini, who took me round the Zogist positions and explained the situation. The Zogist forces were concentrated in the groves and orchards of Fshat, a village separated only by the breadth of the River Mati from Klos, where the Partisans had made their headquarters. Upstream of the two villages the river was spanned by a bridge, over which ran the disused main road leading to the south-east. Abas Kupi feared that the Partisans might try to break back across this bridge in the direction of Guribardhe, where they would still be in his territory and might threaten his communications with Shupal. His immediate aim, therefore, was to deny them the crossing of the river and, at the same time, to harass their flank until Sul Kurti, advancing from Burrel, had forced them to withdraw eastwards beyond the boundaries of Mati. The presence of the Zogist troops in Fshat was by itself sufficient to accomplish the Agha's purpose; and each side was too strongly established on its own bank for either to contemplate an attack across the river. Instead, both were now engaged in demonstrating their mutual animosity in a long-range machine-gun duel. This was the origin of the shooting which had just aroused me and which, so far as I could observe, was as devoid of aim as it was expensive of ammunition. Yet it was not perhaps without moral value; for, where opposing armies are encamped within call of one another, their commanders must make them shoot if they would prevent them from fraternising. 000

I completed my inspection of the Zogists' positions and

000 then retired to await developments in a near-by orchard. There I feasted on red mulberries until spent shots, one of which wounded a fellow fruit-picker — the only casualty of the day — drove me to look for a safer resting-place. I walked towards the river and, during a lull in the firing, came on Murad Basha, the Zogist Chief-of-Staff, seated on a low mound. He was nursing an upset stomach and treated me to a lucid and comprehensive description of his symptoms and to a rather less coherent explanation of the Zogist fire-plan. Our conversation was presently interrupted by the resumption of the machine-gun duel; and the sound of passing bullets made us suddenly aware that, though masked from the enemy by a clump of bushes, we were sitting in the direct line of fire. We moved away hurriedly and, seeing that it was midday, returned to the house where we joined Abas Kupi and his staff for lunch.

I slept through the afternoon, and, waking towards six o'clock, found the rival machine-gunners still busy wasting ammunition. I went out again and in the garden saw Abas Kupi, sitting cross-legged under a tree while a secretary read to him the letters and reports that had come in the afternoon from Tirana. He called me to join him and, bidding one of the guards prepare coffee, handed me a sheaf of German newspapers containing the official account of the attempt on Hitler's life.

" For me he has already been dead a long time," was his only comment.

*669 In the evening, despite the attentions of Partisan snipers, we made our way to another house about a mile from the river. There we were later joined by the Zogist chieftains, who all seemed convinced that the Partisans would withdraw from Mati during the night. Their optimism was presently confirmed by a courier from Sul Kurti, who wrote that he had already halted his troops for the night but that the Partisans were still falling back all along the line.

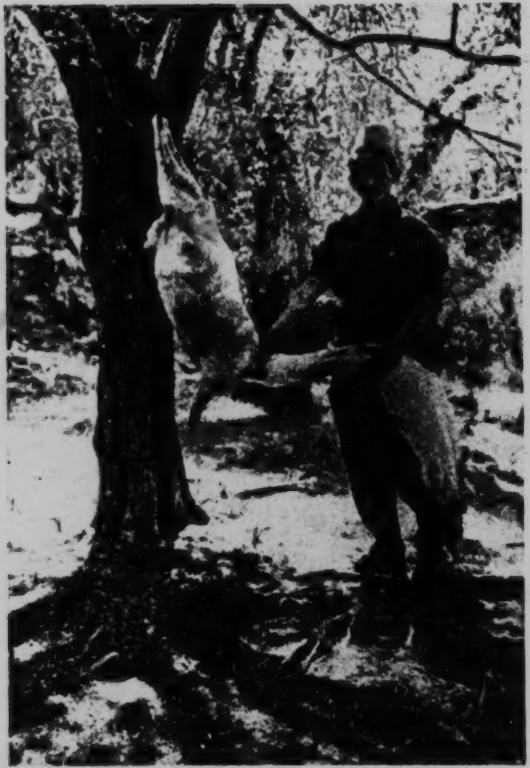
I woke early next morning to learn that the first Zogist patrols had already crossed the river and entered Klos. They

CORPORAL DAVIS (CHUNI) SENDING A SIGNAL BY WIRELESS

DECIPHERING A SIGNAL

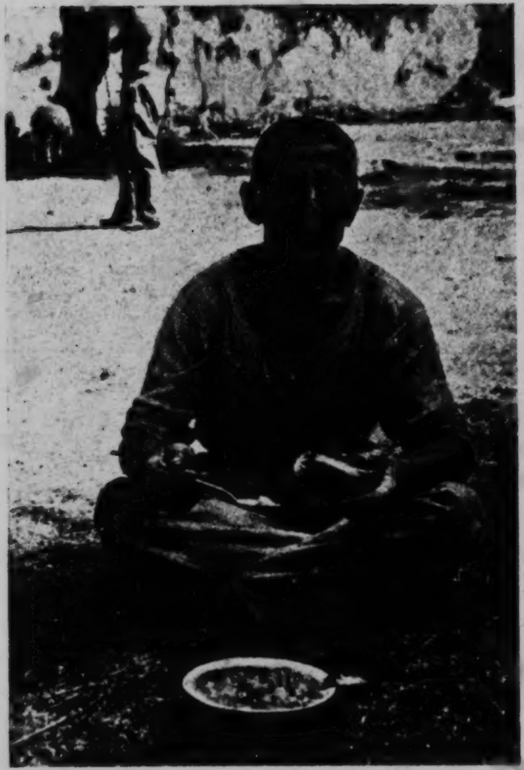
(*Left to Right*) Corporal Davis, Sergeant Jenkins, Sergeant Jones, Sergeant Corsentino (U.S. Air Force)

231



SKINNING A SHEEP

264



SUPPER

*669 had met with no resistance, and had been told by the villagers that the Partisans had marched out before dawn in the direction of Shengyerg and Martanesh. The operations in Mati were over.

Abas Kupi now proposed that we should go to meet Sul Kurti; and we were on the point of setting out when a scout ran up with news that a German column was approaching from the west. Abas Kupi ordered his forces to disperse and, bidding me follow him, retired towards the mountains with a guard of some three hundred men. We climbed for some twenty minutes as fast as lungs and limbs would bear and then halted in a wide patch of scrub, less than a thousand feet above Fshat. From this vantage point we presently saw a column of some five hundred Germans marching slowly along the opposite bank of the river. They went in single file, many of them stripped to the waist, and led a long and varied train of pack-animals. Among these were big Italian mules to carry the mountain guns, Albanian ponies saddled with ammunition boxes and kit, and a number of unladen and diminutive donkeys. I enquired later to what use the donkeys might be put, and was told that the Germans had only commandeered them to sell them at a profit on the Tirana market.

The Germans halted in an orchard by the river and, after posting sentries, bathed and set about preparing a meal. They rested there during the heat of the day, but at about four in the afternoon resumed the advance, now dividing their forces into two. The first column marched east, as if following the Partisan line of retreat towards Martanesh, but the second inclined to the south and, crossing the bridge over the Mati, followed the road towards Guribardhe. I saw that this second column must pass within a thousand yards of where we lay and, on the spur of the moment, appealed to Abas Kupi to attack it, urging that such an action would give the lie to all the rumours of his " collaboration ". His eyes lit up, and he leaned cautiously forward to examine the lie of the ground, as if calculating where best to strike. Then, with a shrug of the shoulders, he sank back and said:

" *Wallahi*! It would be good work; but before I take on

*669 the Germans you must bring these Communists under control and send me the arms you promised."

It was useless to argue; and I turned away to watch through my glasses while the Germans tramped up the dusty road, ignorant that we lurked within range discussing their fate.

We returned that night to Fshat, where the guerillas lit beacons to announce the liberation of the valley and roasted whole sheep in honour of Abas Kupi's bloodless victory. The Partisan rearguards had now retired beyond Shengyerg, and the Zogists had thus recovered the full extent of their territory. Abas Kupi, however, had no illusions that he had won more than a breathing space; and, while the chiefs were still celebrating, took me aside to urge that we should now renew our efforts to stop the civil war. He repeated his assurance that he would not pursue the Partisans beyond his own boundaries, and declared that, in spite of their unprovoked attack, he was still willing to join hands with them to fight against the Germans.

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000 THE first campaign of the civil war was over; and Abas Kupi now prepared to reorganise his forces in Mati and, no doubt, to proceed against those who had actively supported the Partisans. Such reprisals are an inevitable feature of civil war; but I felt that my presence in the valley while they were in progress could serve no useful purpose and might prove impolitic. I decided, therefore, to join Maclean and Smiley to tell them what I had seen, and to discuss plans for the future. Accordingly, on the morning of the 27th July, I took leave of the Agha, and, accompanied by Shaqir, Kolaver, and a small Zogist escort, crossed over Mount Bastar and descended into the Shupal valley. There were rumours that Partisan stragglers still lurked in the woods, and my guards were jumpy, fearing an ambush. Our progress, however, was disturbed only by their fears, and, towards sunset, we toiled up to the head of the Qaf Bechit, following the precipitous path which leads from Shupal to Tirana. Two hours later, after a march which had

lasted altogether twelve hours, we reached the little village of Priske Vogel, where I found Said and Davis. Maclean was down in the plain with Ihsan Toptani; Smiley had not yet come back from his reconnaissance.

They returned together two days later; and we discussed at length our various experiences. Maclean had found it impossible to arrange for the repair of the charging engine, but had instead procured two extra car batteries with which to work the wireless until a new engine could be dropped to us. Smiley for his part had so far failed to discover a beach where Abas Kupi might safely be embarked. He had spent two whole days walking along the coast, disguised as an Albanian, but had found no point where the approach of a boat might reasonably be expected to escape the notice of the Germans. He had, however, come across a friendly sergeant of the Albanian gendarmerie, who had driven him for two hours along the main Tirana–Scutari road. The sergeant had shown him the positions of the German command posts and depots, and had enabled him to mark them in exactly on his map. After these serious investigations Smiley had ridden back along the main road pulling down, or misdirecting, the German traffic signals. He had then decided to enjoy his own joke and had sat for hours at a cross-roads, splitting his sides with laughing as one enemy convoy after another took the wrong turning.

His strangest adventure, however, had occurred on the first evening that he reached the coast. He was walking along a lane with his guide when the two were overtaken by a German soldier on a bicycle. The German dismounted and, bidding them good-evening, started to stroll along beside them. Smiley was still in full battledress uniform, complete with decorations and badges of rank; but in the growing darkness the German only seems to have noticed his white Albanian hat. They chatted in broken Albanian and Italian; and Smiley picked up some useful information about the daily routine in the different German coastal defences. At last, after they had walked together for nearly half an hour, the German wished them good-night and, slipping Smiley and his guide a cigarette, rode off on his bicycle. In his diary Smiley briefly recounts the incident and adds : " Did not murder him as this is a recce. of coast and I do not want to attract attention ".

The village of Priske Vogel was attractively situated among vineyards on the mountainside above Tirana; but the room in which we were lodged was small and indescribably filthy. It had served for some months as the working and sleeping quarters of Captain " Corsair ", a secret Intelligence officer who had lived there alone with his Italian cook, observing enemy troop movements and the traffic on Tirana airfield. "Corsair" had been taken under Partisan "protection" after an ill-fated attempt to stop the civil war; and since his departure no attempt had been made to keep the room swept or clean. The floor was littered with empty bottles and tins; and clouds of fat, sticky flies fastened on every smear of sweat or grease. From dawn till dusk they were a ceaseless torment, drowning in our drinks, swarming over our plates, and making it impossible to sleep or even sit indoors. Most houses in Albania [352] offer sufficient, if primitive, comfort, with their carpets, mattresses, and cushions; but at Priske these had been replaced by two iron bedsteads and a few wooden chairs and benches, hard to the body and sordid to the eye. To these shortcomings was added lack of food; for the surrounding district was poor and offered neither meat, nor eggs, nor milk. Moreover, our courier service to Tirana had temporarily broken down; and we were reduced for several days to subsisting solely on maize bread and stale cheese.

In these disgustful circumstances I was presently stricken by a colic, which was soon contracted by my companions. An unequal diet aggravated our condition, but we dared not leave Priske until the new charging engine had been dropped to us. Bad weather delayed the aeroplane two days, but on the night of 29th July the sortie was carried out according to plan. The natural rapacity of the villagers was perhaps stimulated by the greed of their chieftain, Jemal Herri; thirteen packages and two hundred gold sovereigns were diverted to his use or their own; but the indispensable charging engine was safely recovered.

We now abandoned Priske Vogel and, marching westward for two hours, pitched our camp in a grove of olive trees. This stood on a broad ledge, some two thousand feet above the sea, near the northern horn of the crescent of mountains which lies about Tirana. The approaches to the grove were steep and guarded by friendly villages, while a cleft in the rocks above, tapering into a narrow " chimney ", offered a strenuous but secure retreat across the range and down into Shupal. The local farmers proved generous of their produce; we soon recovered our health; and our comfort was presently assured by the restoration of our courier service. Tirana indeed was only three hours distant; and, from our camp, we commanded an uninterrupted view of the city and its airfield. There, on our first evening, we watched a German bomber crash in the take-off, to enrich the night with a glory of red and golden flame. 000

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THE first clash between Zogists and Partisans was over; and the rival forces were back where they had started. Both were now feverishly preparing for the next round; but, while Abas Kupi could do little to increase the numbers and armament of his men, it was known that substantial reinforcements were marching to the support of the Partisans. The contending forces were thus less equally matched than might at first have appeared; nor was there any sign that the setback to his troops had moderated Enver Hoja's zeal for war. We remained convinced, therefore, that there was no hope of a peaceful settlement unless our Headquarters were prepared to resort to whatever measures might be necessary to force the Partisans to come to terms with the Zogists.

The Smith proposals for a truce and a conference had been seconded at the time by the decision to suspend all supplies of arms to all parties in Albania as long as the civil war continued. We had therefore expected that our Headquarters would meet Enver Hoja's rejection of these proposals by persevering in their decision to cut off his supplies of arms. In Bari, however, *669 opinions had always been divided as to the merits of the Smith Mission: Abas Kupi was suspected of "collaboration"; and it was argued that, although the Partisans were engaged in civil war, they none the less continued, if somewhat infrequently, to fight the Germans. This view was fortified by constant appeals for arms from the British liaison officers with the Partisans; each of whom was primarily concerned, and naturally so, with making a success of his particular mission. The policy of mediation was thus rapidly undermined; and, within a fortnight of Smith's arrival in Albania, the Partisans *669 648 were once more receiving regular supplies of arms. These were dropped, among other units, to the Partisans in Mati, who were thus reinforced with British weapons at the height of their operations against the Zogists.

No word of this important decision had reached us at the time, and we had vigorously denied Abas Kupi's accusations that supplies were again being dropped to the Partisans. Now, more than a fortnight after the event, and in reply to our own pressing enquiries, our Headquarters admitted the facts. The Agha's charges were thus shown to have been well founded, and we reflected bitterly that our innocent denial of them might cause our own good faith to be called into question. Still more discouraging was the knowledge that Headquarters had gone back on their word without explanation and were abandoning the policy of mediation so dramatically initiated by Smith. It was not for us, as a Mission in the field, to complain of changes of policy; and we could only protest at the failure to keep us informed of a decision which touched us so closely. We saw, however, from their replies that, in departing from the terms of the Smith proposals, our Headquarters had not adopted a new policy, but were merely drifting before events which, in this context, meant the pressure of the Partisans. We decided, therefore, to make a last bid to save the situation by putting alternative but definite policies before them, in the hope that these might at least serve to clear their minds.

We urged them to stand by the Smith proposals, stressing that there was still time to stop the civil war if only they were prepared to bring the necessary pressure to bear on Enver

Hoja. This would involve the cutting off of all supplies to the 669*
Partisans and of all propaganda in their favour, and at least the 648
threat of an eventual British occupation. This, we were convinced, was the policy which would best promote our military, as well as our political, interests. At the same time, if such a policy was no longer practicable, then it would only remain for us to transfer our entire support to the Partisans. If we were to decide on such a course, then we must invite Abas Kupi to take refuge in Italy, since we could not, without loss of prestige, allow the destruction of a man with whom we had been so closely identified. We should also have to encourage such Nationalist leaders as Gani Kryeziu, or Muharrem Bairaktar, to join the L.N.C. while they might still hope to obtain favourable terms of admission. Such a policy was necessarily one of appeasement and would imply the relegation of Albania to the Soviet sphere of influence. It might, however, limit the extent of the civil war, and would enable us to cut our losses with the least dishonour.

Rather to our surprise, Headquarters agreed that these alternative policies represented the only courses of action still open to us. They lacked authority, however, to decide which of the two should be adopted, and therefore signalled back that they were referring the whole question to London for settlement. We received this news with dismay, for prompt action was the essence of either policy. At any moment Enver Hoja might overpower the Zogists; and their defeat would rule out the adoption of the former course and deprive us of any credit we might have gained from the latter. As a Mission, however, we had exhausted the possibilities of intervention, and could now only wait for instructions and upon events.

Under the circumstances, we judged that our presence at 000
Zogist headquarters could only be a source of mutual embarrassment, both to Abas Kupi and to ourselves. We could not explain away the fact that arms were again being dropped to the Partisans; nor could we any longer pretend that our Headquarters were working to end the civil war. There was little, therefore, that we could achieve by meeting, and, though we

000 maintained a regular correspondence, we only once saw the Agha in the whole period between 26th July and 13th August. We continued, however, to work out plans for his journey to Italy but, in spite of several reconnaissances, were at last obliged to abandon hope of an evacuation by sea. Nor were we more successful in our attempts to arrange for him to be flown out; for the R.A.F. rejected the different landing-grounds we proposed, as well as a suggestion that a seaplane might pick us up on Lake Scutari.

622 Meanwhile we maintained close relations with Jemal Herri, who was the paramount influence in the region where we were encamped. Jemal had now embarked on the greatest conspiracy of a life devoted to intrigue. The seat of his influence was near to Tirana, and he had long nourished the design of attempting a *coup de main* on the capital in the moment when the Germans withdrew. Hitherto he had held his hand, for timing was of the essence of his plan; but now some substance was lent to the perennial rumours of a German withdrawal by the sudden evacuation of their wounded. Jemal therefore prepared to strike and, encouraged by the presence of a British Mission in his territory, strove to rally to his cause dissident Zogists and Ballists, disappointed "collaborationists", and renegade Partisans. These intrigues were conducted from Jemal's new and comfortable house at Zali Herrit, built, so it was said, with the gold which he had robbed from the British Missions.

We paid several visits to this house; for it had become a useful centre of information, and a meeting-place for men of all parties. Lunching there one day, I found Osman Taroku, a German spy whom we had unsuccessfully tried to liquidate some weeks before. Few secrets are kept for long in Albania; and I have no doubt that Osman knew of our intentions towards him. He showed no sign, however, of embarrassment and, after lunch, challenged me to a game of chess. I have never been much of a chess player, but found on this occasion that the contest derived a special savour from the knowledge that we were hunting each other in real life as well as on the board.

At the beginning of the civil war our rear base at Murait 000 had been overrun by the Germans. We knew that some of its personnel had found refuge with the Partisans, but had remained without news of Merret and Sergeants Jones and Jenkins. We had begun to fear that they must have perished, or been taken prisoner, when, at the beginning of August, Merret walked into our camp, followed next day by the two sergeants and a crowd of Italian camp-followers. Merret now told us that their base had been overrun by the Germans and Partisans in turn. Caught between these two fires they had withdrawn into the forests of Lura, where they had eked out a precarious and frugal existence until the retreat of the Partisans had enabled them to join the Zogist forces near Matsukull. Save for Sergeant Jones, who was suffering from a bad bout of malaria, they seemed none the worse for their experience; and Merret now set out to make a close reconnaissance of Tirana airfield.

We remained a fortnight encamped beneath the olive trees, 669+ waiting for instructions from Headquarters and revolving 648 plans for our uncertain future. A few political leaders came out to see us from Tirana, all imploring British intervention to end the civil war. We heard them patiently, but turned guarded answers, for we were now as ignorant of British intentions as they. Among other visitors came Kiamil, the [622] headman of Derye, who had sheltered Hare and Seymour through the winter. Kiamil had sought to remain neutral during the civil war, but the Partisans could not forgive his close association with the British and had burnt down his house and carried off his cattle — in all some two hundred sheep and eight cows. Robbed of all his substance, he was on his way to Tirana to seek the hospitality of a merchant whom he had once befriended. We could only hope that this earlier act of kindness would be better rewarded than had been his service to the Allied cause.

Each day brought its visits, and much time was spent in 000 the questioning of couriers and spies. Meanwhile kind sympathisers brought us French and Italian books from Tirana to

000 amuse our leisure; and an old Turkish lady, an aunt of Said Kryeziu, sent us sweetmeats worthy of Haji Bekir, which she had made for us herself.

186
622 In these long hours of waiting Said won our respect by his coolness and sincerity, and our friendship by his sense of humour and understanding. His Western education brought us closer to him than to most of his compatriots; and the objective quality of his mind enabled him to discuss dispassionately the problems of his country. By conviction a Social Democrat, his sympathies had at first inclined towards the Partisans and he had publicly rebuked Abas Kupi for his reluctance to attack the Germans. But he could not condone Enver Hoja's unprovoked attack against the Zogists, and had been deeply shocked by the deliberate destruction of the homes of the Mati *Beys*. He saw now that the Partisans were bent on establishing a regime no less dictatorial than that of the Fascists, and began to fear that the last state of his country might be worse than the first. For us, as British officers, the civil war presented practical problems to be primarily considered in terms of the war with Germany and the protection of British interests. For Said, as an Albanian patriot, it raised moral issues of transcending importance, and brought him face to face with the great ideological division of Europe which the war against Fascism had masked but not healed. At times his disgust with both sides made him long to return to Jakova to escape from politics and serve as a soldier in his brother's forces. He was convinced, however, that only the British could safeguard his country's independence and so agreed, though reluctantly, to stay with us.

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000 In the early hours of the 11th August I felt a hand on my shoulder and woke up to hear Maclean saying:

"Tell me what you make of this: it sounds like trouble for someone."

I propped myself up on my elbow and listened in silence, while the sound of firing broke in on the stillness of the night.

It came from the mountainside below; and presently we saw a spray of tracer bullets flash across a ravine barely an hour's climb away. The rattle of machine-guns and the occasional burst of a mortar bomb proclaimed that this was no ordinary tribal feud; and we concluded that either Germans or Partisans must be attacking Jemal Herri's forces. As we sat straining into the darkness the noise of battle seemed to draw nearer; our capture might well be among the aims of the invaders; and Maclean judged it more prudent to withdraw. We roused our guards and mule-men therefore; and in a few minutes the wireless equipment was loaded up and our mounts were saddled. Most of our pack-animals, however, had been sent down to the plain to graze, and we were thus compelled to leave behind the bulk of our stores and the kitchen utensils we had slowly accumulated.

We rode away towards the west, leaving the battle behind us, and, crossing the range at daybreak, came out on the seaward-looking slopes of the mountains that rise from the plain of Kruya. Half an hour later we halted in a clump of trees, and, hoping that Jemal's assailants might have retired, sent back scouts to find out how the fighting had gone. They joined us again within the hour and reported that Jemal Herri's forces had been dispersed by Partisans who were now in possession of our camp. They seemed to be in some strength; and our scouts had observed one of their patrols following on our tracks. Maclean therefore gave the order to resume the march, and the men dejectedly shouldered their rifles and untethered the mules. They were sure that the Partisans were after us and were robbed of their spirit by the prospect of another lean time of hiding. One of my guards indeed now came up to ask for his wages, saying that he wanted to go home; the others watched narrowly to see how we would meet this first defection; and I answered that he was free to go if he chose but that we did not pay deserters. The man stood still for a moment, torn between greed and fear, and then, seeing that he got no support from his comrades, slunk away muttering that he would stay with us till the next pay day. Disaffected mercenaries, however, make dangerous bodyguards; and, 000 now that honour was satisfied by his submission, we paid the man his wage and dismissed him.

We now continued northwards, traversing the rugged mountainside and descending gradually towards the plain. The day was broiling hot; and we moved slowly with frequent rests, for Smiley was weak from a heavy fever. Suddenly towards noon Said pointed out several small figures just visible against the sky-line on the crest of the range above. We guessed that they were Partisan scouts and, leaving the path, scrambled down out of sight to the shelter of a steep-sided ravine. We followed its course down towards the plain and soon came out into a stretch of woodland folded between the main range and its breastwork of foothills. A dense undergrowth of brambles made the wood almost impenetrable, but at length we discovered a path and presently halted in a small clearing by the side of a sluggish stream.

As a camping-site our choice left much to be desired; the ground was swampy, and men and beasts soon turned it into a morass of black mud. The stagnant waters, moreover, were evil smelling; and the moisture which they diffused made the heat of day oppressive and shrouded the night in a chilling ground mist. Clouds of mosquitoes tormented our sleep; and Maclean and I both found small scorpions in our clothes. But, if the clearing made an uncomfortable camp, we judged it none the less a safe "hide-out", alike from the Partisans on the mountains above and from the Germans in the plains below. Accordingly we remained there four days, waiting for the situation to crystallise.

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*669 AFTER his initial victory in Mati, Abas Kupi had refrained at our instance from pursuing the Partisans beyond his boundaries. His forbearance, however, went unrewarded by the British, and was to deprive him both of the military initiative and of the goodwill of the "collaborationist" leaders. The latter, indeed, relying on Zogist support, had prepared ambitious plans to disrupt the northward march of the Partisans and to throw them back across the River Shkumbi. Their hopes of victory were now shattered by what they considered as Abas Kupi's defection; and their natural resentment was inflamed by the scorn of their German masters. The Germans indeed were quick to realise that their satellites had been outmanœuvred by Abas Kupi, who had exploited their help without embracing their cause. They therefore bluntly told Fikri Dine that he would not receive a single napoleon or cartridge from them until Abas Kupi had entered Tirana and formally adhered to an anti-Communist front. Faced with this ultimatum, which threatened their government's existence, the "collaborationists" sought to compel Abas Kupi to comply with its terms. His supplies of bread were interrupted; an offer of funds made by the Tirana Chamber of Commerce was withdrawn; and he was informed that he might no longer count on the support of the tribesmen of Mirdita. The Agha, however, refused to be intimidated by these reprisals; he had made use of the "collaborationists" for his own ends, but he was not prepared to be used by them. He therefore declined a temporary advantage which must have led to a rupture of relations with the British, in whom he discerned the last remaining hope of his cause. The British, however, proved unresponsive; and when Enver Hoja attacked the Zogists stood alone.

The Partisans launched their second offensive against Mati on the morning of 10th August. Klos fell without fighting; and by evening they were in occupation of Burrel. The tribesmen, however, rallied during the night and, under the command of Billal Kola, counter-attacked at dawn and recaptured Burrel. After this unexpected Zogist success both sides rested on their arms, and for two days the men of Mati expected succours from Abas Kupi or from Mirdita. They expected them in vain; and the interruption of their food supplies, coupled with a display of British 'planes dropping arms to their enemies, admonished them that they were fighting in a lost cause. The Agha alone might still have restored their morale, but he remained near Kruya, unaccountably inactive. The tribesmen therefore fell back when the

*669 Partisans returned to the attack, and dispersed without fighting to their homes. The most loyal, or most compromised, of their chiefs made their way across the Qaf Stamm pass to the Zogist headquarters; the remainder hastened to make their submission to the victors.

Meanwhile a smaller force of Partisans had been sent against Shupal and, by the evening of the 10th August, had overrun the full extent of that valley. The same night their commander despatched a band of some three hundred men across the Qaf Bechit with orders to capture our Mission. They crossed the pass at midnight and, an hour or so later, stumbled on one of Jemal Herri's patrols which gave the alarm. Jemal, however, was wholly unprepared and in the confusion of the night could only muster his personal bodyguard, less than fifty strong. His men were thus many times outnumbered by their assailants, but they were well equipped; and their two mortars and machine-guns were manned by professional, foreign soldiers. They knew the ground, moreover, and were still stubbornly disputing the approaches to our camp when dawn revealed that we had made good our escape. Their first objective thus accomplished, they began to withdraw towards the valley to defend Zali Herrit. The Partisans, however, had anticipated such a move; a part of their forces delayed the return of Jemal's men, while another stormed the village, burnt his house, and carried off his mistress. Jemal was now left with no more than a dozen stalwarts, but such was his rage that he kept up the fight until near midday. Then, seeing that all was lost, he bade his bodyguard disperse and retired through Tirana to a farm-house in the plain beyond.

The Partisans thus finally broke Abas Kupi's hold on Mati and Shupal, and further sapped his military strength by the destruction and dispersal of Jemal Herri's forces. The network of the Zogist organisation might still extend throughout Albania, but the effective basis of the Agha's power was now reduced to the province of Kruya, his personal stronghold. There he still maintained an army of some two thousand men, precariously confined between the Partisans, who already held the reverse slopes of the Kruya mountains, and the Germans, who guarded the city and the main road. He was thus shorn of more than half of his fighting strength; and the prestige of his movement was undermined, on the one hand by his failure to obtain British support, and on the other by his refusal to come to terms with the Germans. He still remained the most powerful of the Nationalist leaders, and still had funds enough to keep his forces on a war footing for some weeks. All knew, however, that, unless he could win outside support, he was doomed; and now, for the first time, his authority was challenged by discontented elements within the Zogist movement. These blamed his hesitations as the cause of their disasters and looked to Jemal Herri for a lead. 669*

At the height of this crisis in his affairs,[1] Abas Kupi came to our "hide-out" in the swamp to tell us how matters stood and to seek our help. He sat down on Smiley's sleeping-bag and, using Said as interpreter, told us of his defeat in quiet tones but with brutal frankness. He spoke with biting sarcasm of the defection of the men of Mati, and scornfully contrasted Jemal Herri's feverish intrigues with his military unpreparedness. For the first time, too, he commended the skill and persistence of his opponents and showed that he was under no illusion as to their strength. He then appealed for British help, recalling his past services to the Allied cause and representing that his defeat must also be ours. For a moment we were at a loss for a reply; and, seeing us hesitate, he exclaimed: [648]

"If you can't help me to reach an understanding with the Communists, then only the Fascists can help me to defend myself against them."

We urged the folly of committing himself to a defeated cause, especially when British policy was still undecided. His situation might be critical; it was not yet hopeless; and the continued presence of our Mission showed that we had not yet abandoned him. We were not in a position to give him official advice, for we were still in the dark as to our government's instructions. Our personal opinion, however, was that he should keep his hands clean of all stain of "collaboration"

[1] [i.e. in mid-August, 1944. Cf. Cat. 116, pp. 242-243.--Analyst]

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and try somehow to hold his forces together. Then he would be ready to exploit to the full the first favourable turn of the wheel of fortune.

Abas Kupi heard us in silence, but his subsequent actions suggested that he had approved our advice. His first care was to repair his personal prestige and to establish himself solidly in the regions that remained to him. Next day, therefore, he fell upon the Partisans who had remained in occupation of Jemal Herri's district and drove them back in disorder over the Qaf Bechit. Having thus in part retrieved his reputation as a military commander, he expected Jemal's arrival, determined to reassert his own authority within the Zogist movement.

After his defeat by the Partisans, Jemal Herri had retired into the plain to lick his wounds and plan his next move. He needed time to repair his wasted strength, but once Abas Kupi had delivered his patrimony of Zali Herrit, he could no longer afford to remain in hiding. He therefore returned to the Zogist headquarters, accompanied by only two bodyguards and strangely overwrought, so we afterwards were told, for a man whose imperturbability had been a byword. It would seem, indeed, that he saw his last hope of power, and perhaps of safety, in a direct challenge to Abas Kupi's leadership; and he at once launched out into a bitter harangue against him before a group of chiefs and bodyguards assembled on the grass outside. He was still speaking when Abas Kupi emerged from the house to meet him; Jemal stopped in mid-sentence; and the two men concealed their mutual hatred in a formal embrace. Abas Kupi then led the way indoors; and they sat down cross-legged in a corner of the guest-room. The Zogist staff presently withdrew; and, as they left, Abas shouted to a henchman to bring coffee. Ten minutes later the henchman returned to say that their stock had run out; Abas hardly looked up, and called angrily:

"Get out. We shan't need coffee now."

There was no witness to their conversation, but the Zogists say that Abas Kupi reproached Jemal bitterly for his disloyalty and for his intrigues with the Ballists and the Germans. Harsh things were said on either side, and the Agha used the word

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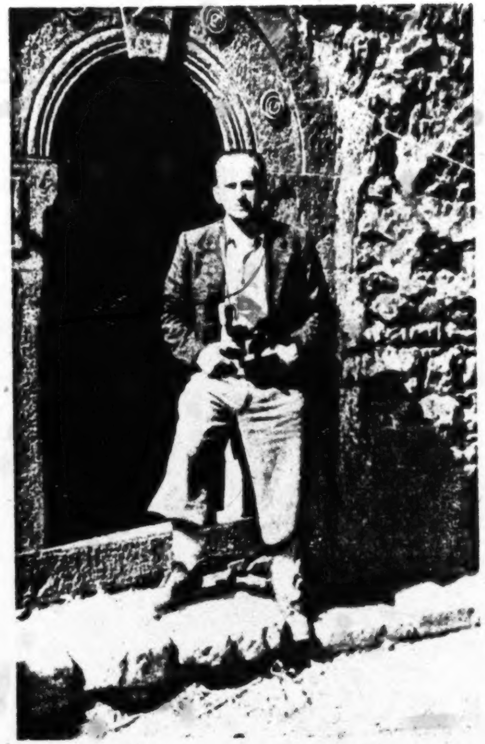

IHSAN BEY TOPTANI

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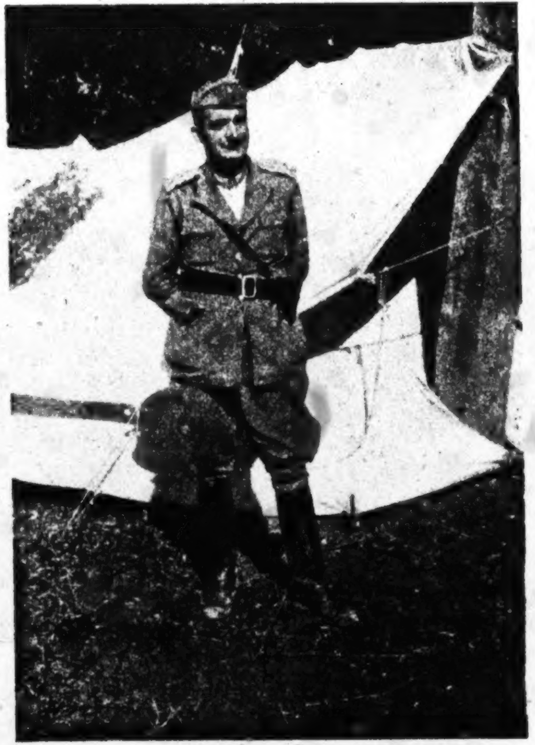

GENERAL PRENK PREVISI,
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ALBANIAN ARMY

A MIRDITE CLANSMAN

OUR HOSTESS AT SKURRAI

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"traitor". Jemal saw red and reached for his gun; but the Agha was quicker on the draw. Only one shot was heard; and when the bodyguards rushed in they found Jemal sprawling on his back with a bullet through his brain. His hands were still twitching; and one of the guards discharged a submachine-gun into his heart.[1] The Agha had shown his teeth, and with one shot all opposition was silenced. "For the ways are many but death is one. . . ."

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We now abandoned our "hide-out" in the swamp and pitched a camp in an olive grove near Mukai, the scene of the Agha's ill-starred attempt to reconcile the Ballists and the L.N.C. Our mission had meanwhile been strengthened by the arrival of four Russian soldiers, who had served for some months in Jemal Herri's bodyguard. Pavle and Mishka I (so called by us to distinguish him from a comrade of the same name) were both Great Russians, and had been agricultural workers on a collective farm. Pavle was a stolid, rather bearish fellow, who turned out to be quite a good cook; Mishka was a gay, handsome peasant, with curly, golden hair and an impudent laugh. The other two were Ukrainians; Ivan, a robust, red-cheeked youth, who had worked in the accountant's office of a collective farm, and Mishka II, a tractor mechanic with a lean and hungry look. All four had been captured by the Germans in 1942, and had been drafted from their prison camp into the Todt Labour Organisation. For a time they had been employed on repairing bomb damage in the Ruhr and in Belgrade, but in the autumn of 1943 they had been sent to Albania to work on the roads. There they had decided to escape to the guerillas, and, after wandering for two days in the mountains, had at last found refuge with Jemal Herri.

All four were of good physique, and the energy which they

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[1] On Jemal's body were found forty-seven gold sovereigns; a mere fraction of the total which he had robbed from our Mission. Abas Kupi offered to restore this sum to us, but we declined a payment which might have implicated us in Jemal's death.

000 expended was only matched by the quantities of food which they consumed. They were scrupulously clean, shaved daily, and, in marked contrast to ourselves and to our N.C.O.s, cut each other's hair once a week. Their discipline was impressive, if somewhat artificial, and for a long time they would never think of addressing any of the officers of the Mission without first standing to attention. Later they copied the more democratic manners of the British soldiers, finding our freer ways agreeable, if at first rather puzzling. We employed them as personal bodyguards and to supervise the mule-men, and treated them exactly as we did our British Other Ranks.

To share the intimacies of guerilla life with four Russian peasants afforded us a most welcome opportunity of studying the outlook of the Common Man in the Soviet Union. They were simple folk, and, like peasants in every country, at first rather suspicious. Circumstances, however, made them completely dependent upon us; and, seeing that we treated them as if they were our own men, they soon came to look on us as if we had been their own officers. With their confidence we soon won their affection; and they would tell us naturally of their work and life at home, and even ask our advice on their most intimate problems. In the space of two months I came to know them well, and was especially impressed by their distinct, if crude, conception of the historical development and social purpose of the collective-farm system under which they worked. As land-workers they were conscious of filling a place in Soviet society and seemed imbued with a strong loyalty to their particular farms and to the agricultural industry as a whole. We found in them, too, a peculiar curiosity about machinery, wholly free from the " luddite" inhibitions which still linger in capitalist countries. They would often ask us to describe some British machine; and their interest in the subject seemed to be combined of the craftsman's love of his tools and of a more general, almost religious, belief in the limitless possibilities of technical progress. Their education indeed was chiefly technical, and, though Ivan had read some of the Russian classics, their standard of general knowledge, especially of events outside of their own country, was remark-

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ably low. All four were atheists; but Ivan's fund of comic stories at the expense of his village priest suggested that this individual was still a well-known local figure with considerable influence, at least over the older people.

The Young Communist League had instilled into them the rudiments of Marxist teaching, but their interest in politics was local rather than national. They regarded it as their right to elect the governing body of their collective farm, or to discuss the interpretation of some new law which affected their work; but it had never occurred to them, as ordinary land-workers, to criticise the conduct or the policies of their country's leaders. An immeasurable distance seemed to separate them from the world of affairs in Moscow; the distance, moral as well as physical, which separates the trooper from the General Staff. One evening we spoke of the political trials of the " deviationists "; and Ivan said to us in explanation:

" We were told that these men were conspiring with the Germans against Stalin. We never knew whether it was true, but things like that happen to the big commissars away in Moscow."

It was the language of the immemorial East; and I reflected that an Ottoman cultivator might well have used such words in describing the intrigues of the seraglio.

Another fugitive from the wreck of Jemal Herri's forces was Lieutenant Karl von Warnecke, a young German from a distinguished Hanoverian family. Von Warnecke had served in the brigade of paratroops which had been dropped to hold Tirana for the Germans at the time of the Italian armistice. His company had at once been sent into action against Abas Kupi; the Captain had been killed on the first day of the battle of Kruya; and the Lieutenant who had taken over command had lost his nerve. In the heat of the moment Von Warnecke had called him a coward, and, according to his own account, had only saved the situation by leading a charge in deliberate disobedience of orders. The credit for the action, however, had gone to the Lieutenant, who had been promoted Captain and had subjected Von Warnecke to every

000 petty humiliation which he could devise. The young man's life in the regiment had been made unendurable, until one evening in the mess he had lost his temper and slapped the new Captain's face. He had been placed under open arrest for striking a superior officer, and had been warned by a friend that reduction to the ranks would be his punishment. He had therefore deserted and found employment in Jemal Herri's bodyguard as a machine-gun instructor. He came to us now, haggard and almost toothless, though still only twenty years old; a desperate fellow with his hand against every man's. He made no pretence of hating the Nazi regime but told us frankly that he only sought to work for us because he had cut himself off from his own kind.

In such men professional pride sometimes supplies the place of honour, so that they make good agents. We decided, therefore, to put him to the test, and sent him to Tirana to spy on his compatriots. We never heard what happened to him there; but some days later he arrived at the headquarters of a Partisan unit and asked to be sent to the nearest British liaison officer. He claimed to bring important information, but the Partisans were taking no chances and cut his throat.

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727 WE still[1] remained without instructions; but the march of events did not wait on the deliberations of our staff officers and diplomats. The days of German rule in the Balkans were numbered. The Red army was advancing into Roumania; Bucharest lay in the grip of a political crisis; and the leaders of Bulgaria prepared to abandon a lost cause. The Germans had already begun to withdraw their troops from Greece and no longer made any secret that they would soon be leaving Albania. The prospect of their withdrawal conjured up the spectre of a Communist victory; and the Nationalist leaders in Tirana were made desperate by their fears for the future. The bankruptcy of the policy of "collaboration" was plain to all; and we judged that, in their terror of Communism, the Nation-

[1] [i.e. in mid-August 1944 -- Analyst]

alists would resort to any course of action which offered even 661*
the hope of British support. 727

We therefore decided that the time was ripe for a last attempt to raise a Nationalist revolt against the Germans. Abas Kupi seemed to be the natural leader for such a revolt, by virtue of his military power, his personal prestige, and his long connection with the British. The civil war, however, had made great inroads on his strength ; and we knew that he could not fight alone. At the same time we surmised that the Ballist leaders, the Captain of Mirdita, and even the members of the Government might now be persuaded to seek their safety and the forgiveness of the Allies by rallying to the Agha's cause.

Accordingly, on the afternoon of 16th August, Maclean and I set out from Mukai and met Abas Kupi in the foothills of the range above the plain of Kruya. We sat with him for two hours, urging that the Germans were weak and that, if he attacked them now, he might still influence our Headquarters to decide their policy in his favour. We reminded him too that, though we could make no promise of political support, we were always ready to supply him with arms as soon as he should take the field. Our arguments were strengthened by his own despair, and, if he heard us without enthusiasm, it was also without objection.

We left him at sunset and pushed on across the plain to Ihsan Toptani's farm. There we had planned a meeting with Nureddin Vlora, through whose intermediary we hoped to convey our views to the leaders of the Government and of the Balli Kombetar. Nureddin was well qualified for such a task by his known pro-British sympathies, and his personal and political influence might make him a powerful advocate of our thesis. Ihsan told us, however, that the Germans had begun a reign of terror in the capital and had arrested a number of Albanians on the mere suspicion of favouring the Allies. At such a moment Nureddin did not wish to attract attention by leaving Tirana, and had therefore suggested that we postpone our meeting until the present " terror " had subsided. Such 000
prudence was certainly justifiable, but it seemed to us that the German policy of repression must excite the indignation of the

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Albanians by its methods and their contempt by its motives. We were thus more than ever convinced that the time was ripe for our intervention, and therefore decided that, if Nureddin could not leave Tirana, one of us must go there to see him. Ihsan agreed to make the necessary arrangements for the visit; and Maclean being too tall and fair ever to pass as an Albanian, regretfully conceded my claim to undertake the mission.

In the morning, therefore, I laid aside my uniform, and with it such protection as my military status might have afforded, and dressed in a grey suit of Ihsan. I am dark enough to pass as an Albanian, and, apart from the danger that I might be recognised and denounced to the Germans, the chief risks which I ran arose from my lack of identity papers and from my slender knowledge of the Albanian tongue. Ihsan, however, told me that it was some weeks since he had been challenged for his identity card, so that we decided to leave this problem to chance. As to the difficulties of language, it was agreed that I should pose as a German if stopped by the gendarmes and as an Albanian if stopped by the Germans. In the former pose the pride of the Herrenvolk, and in the latter the vagueness of the Orient, might serve to explain the absence of my papers. Each of us, moreover, "packed" a gun and a bag of gold, and we might hope to buy or shoot our way out of any embarrassing encounter.

Thus equipped, we set out towards ten o'clock in a closed carriage, driven by an old and trusted coachman of the Toptanis. With the shortage of petrol, horse-drawn vehicles had again become common in Tirana; and Ihsan had decided that a carriage, although slower, would be less likely to attract attention than a car. We rumbled over dusty country lanes, stopping once for Ihsan to greet some neighbours, and to explain that I was a sick relation whom he was taking to the doctor. After an hour or so we joined the main road and drove along the edge of the airfield, observing its scrap heaps of twisted fuselage and the charred skeletons of its hangars, blitzed by the R.A.F. Beyond it stood the "check-post" which marked the entrance to Tirana. The barrier was raised, and a group of Albanian gendarmes lounged and smoked in the sun some ten yards back from the road. Behind them 000 through the window of a little wooden hut, I could see two German military policemen writing at a desk. Our coachman shouted some greeting to the gendarmes, and one of them beckoned us on with a lordly gesture. The two Germans looked up for a moment and then went back to their work. The coachman cracked his whip and we rolled into the capital.

Tirana was to us what Damascus had once been to Lawrence; 361 the goal towards which we strained. We had scanned it through our glasses, imagined it in our dreams, and made its capture the myth of our struggle. Now at last I had entered it, though in disguise and not in triumph. The streets down which we drove from the "check-post" were dirty, and presented the usual Balkan contrast of cheap, modern structures, interspersed with hovels. Towards the centre of the city, however, the hovels ceased, and the buildings assumed a more solid, as well as a more agreeable, appearance. Presently we emerged into a broad and pleasing square which was the heart of the city. At one end of it stood a painted mosque with broad dome and slender minaret; at the other an ornamental clock-tower rose above a small public garden, flanked by gay cafés and attractive shops. Beyond the city's heart was its head—a wide crescent of well-proportioned buildings of Italian design. These were the government offices; and, as we passed them, Ihsan pointed out the windows of the Council Chamber, whence Fikri Dine and his colleagues still issued their vain decrees. A few moments later the coachman pulled up in a narrow street at the entrance to Ihsan's Tirana home. Immediately opposite stood a German sentry, on duty outside the Hôtel Metropole, where the *Gestapo* had made their headquarters.

We went indoors and were presently joined first by a friend 000 of Ihsan, who had known that I was coming, and then by an agent of Abas Kupi who had recognised me as we drove into the town. They told us of the latest arrests made by the *Gestapo*, and also brought us a summary of an important speech by the Bulgarian Premier, foreshadowing his government's rupture with Germany. We sat talking for perhaps

000 half an hour, and then towards midday Ihsan summoned the carriage to take us to our meeting with Nureddin Vlora. We drove out past the ultra-modern Hôtel Daiti, the centre of "collaborationist" intrigue, and beyond King Zog's palace, a tall, yellow building set in an overgrown park, entered the smart, residential quarter of the town. For some minutes our coachman followed a broad, shady avenue and then, turning into a side road, pulled up outside a modern villa built in a small garden. I got down from the carriage and saw two German soldiers standing on the other side of the road. For a fraction of a second I feared that we had been betrayed, but Ihsan quickly explained that they were only guarding the German Minister's residence. We were to lunch in the villa opposite.

This villa belonged to a friend of Nureddin and might well have been in Paris from the taste and style of its decoration. Our charming, French-speaking hostess let us in herself, and I stayed talking with her while Ihsan and her husband went to fetch Nureddin. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and I was dismissed to the dining-room while she went out to answer it. She was back in a few moments and told me with a smile that the visitor had been a young attaché from the German Legation opposite, who had come to ask permission to retrieve his dog from the garden. Our host and Ihsan presently returned with Nureddin; and we sat down to an excellent lunch with delicious Turkish dishes, good Italian wine, and genuine Benedictine. Our hostess served us herself, having given her maid the day off for greater safety.

727 Nureddin was resplendent in white ducks and a white silk bush-shirt, and seemed as fit and debonair as at our first meeting. He began by discussing the demoralisation of the Germans and the reign of terror which they had recently inaugurated. Their strength was ebbing away, their friends were already deserting, and in the rising tide of revolt they sought to preserve their authority by making themselves feared. Their first important victim had been the Ballist leader, Skender Mucho. They had shot him two days before without trial, but on the suspicion — so the *Gestapo* headquarters had

7: Amery G-5 (1943-44) 1948 EG1 Albania EG1 /

let it be known — that he had been in touch with the British. 727
Since then they had arrested some forty prominent Ballists believed to entertain pro-Allied sympathies, and had deported them to the notorious concentration camp at Zemun, in Yugoslavia. Nor were their relations with the Albanian Government of a more cordial nature: they had altogether lost confidence in Fikri Dine, and dared not supply him with the arms and funds which they had promised, lest he should turn against them. They knew themselves defeated; they were haunted by the fear of revolt, and started even at their own shadows. Bitter intrigues flourished among them; and the S.S. General Fistun, who had assumed supreme command in Albania after the attempt on Hitler's life, had arrested a number of his own officers on grounds of political unreliability.

Nureddin had described the despair of the Germans with 669+
satisfaction: he now discussed the prospects of the Albanians with dismay. The Partisans already hung on the fringes of Tirana, and there was scarcely a night when they did not raid into its suburbs. Unless preventive measures were taken they would break into the city when the Germans left, and, as he delicately put it:

"I dread to think what may happen, for life in the mountains has made some of these boys rather rough."

He went on to speak of his fears of violent revolution and of the destruction of the "cultured classes". The situation was desperate, and, unless the British were prepared to restrain the Partisans, the Albanian Nationalists were politically and personally doomed. He paused a moment and added:

"If there is anything we can still do to gain your help, tell me; and you may be sure that I will do everything in my power to see that the Nationalist leaders follow your advice."

I had been waiting for such an opening, and answered: 000

"It is already the eleventh hour and I can promise nothing. But if all of you will now turn on the Germans and attack them with all your forces, perhaps something can still be saved."

The news from Roumania and Bulgaria illustrated my argument and Nureddin only asked:

000 " To whom should we rally ? "

" You will find us with Abas Kupi," I answered, and he signified that he had understood.

We were still talking when a middle-aged man of heavy build with close-cropped grey hair and vinous countenance came into the room. He greeted me in fluent, rather clipped English ; and indeed, but for the suspicion of a foreign accent, he might well have been a retired colonel from a British cavalry regiment. This was Nureddin's brother, Jemaleddin Vlora Pasha, the last Albanian to bear the title. Jemaleddin had been a dignitary at the court of Sultan Reshad and had married a daughter of the Khedive of Egypt. After the downfall of the Ottoman Empire he had lived for some years in Cairo, where he had known Lord Lloyd and other leading Englishmen connected with the Middle East. Unlike his brother, he played little part in politics, but he remembered the strong anti-Communist prejudices of his English friends and simply could not believe that we would ever abandon his country to the Partisans. Revolution was spreading over the Balkans like an irresistible flood ; kings, statesmen, and generals were engulfed in a common ruin ; and, while the Partisans hammered at the gates of Tirana, the last Pasha of Albania turned to me and said :

" You really must do something, my dear fellow, or we shall have a lot of trouble with these rotters up in the mountains."

" Whom the Gods would destroy . . ."

727 From these conversations we walked back through Tirana towards Ihsan's flat. The sun shone, and the crowd in the streets reproduced all the contrasts of Albanian life. Ragged peasants in white caps and baggy breeches rubbed shoulders with smart, Italianised young officials. There were old-fashioned Balkan merchants, some still wearing the red fez of Turkish times ; down-at-heel soldiers of the regular army ; and Ballist irregulars, armed to the teeth and swathed in bandoliers. Every now and then we also passed small groups of German officers and soldiers, hurrying to their offices with

bulging brief-cases, or strolling towards the shops and cafés. Boyish in their tropical kit, pestered by pedlars and jostled by the oriental throng, they reminded me irresistibly of British troops in the Middle East. I had served myself in Cairo and Jerusalem; and it was a new experience, and perhaps not uninstructive, to see an army of occupation from the point of view of the native.

Ihsan had arranged for me to meet two other political leaders and I spent the next hour or so in his house, answering their questions and urging them to take up arms against the Germans. Having thus diffused my arguments into the political world of Tirana, I went out again to reconnoitre the *Wehrmacht*, *Luftwaffe*, and *Gestapo* headquarters. My purpose was to check up on rumours that the Germans had begun to evacuate them, and also to find out how they were defended in case we should ever have a chance to attempt an insurrection. We were thus engaged when suddenly an open carriage pulled up beside us, and one of Abas Kupi's officers jumped out and shook me warmly by the hand. His mission seemed analagous to my own, and I trusted his discretion as well as his goodwill. It was the second time, however, that I had been recognised that day, and we were thus ominously reminded how small was the Albanian capital.

The day's work was done, and there was nothing to be 000
gained by further delay. We stopped to buy a filigree cigarette case as a souvenir of my visit, and then returned to Ihsan's house to pick up the carriage. We drove back along the same dirty streets by which we had entered the city and reached the "check-post" about half an hour before sunset. A convoy of some thirty trucks was waiting for the night to leave for Scutari; and a company or so of German soldiers sat smoking by the roadside. The gendarmes were checking the papers of two young Albanians driving a small car; and it seemed for a moment that they would ask for ours. One of them, however, recognised Ihsan's coachman and waved us on with a friendly smile.

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WAR ON TWO FRONTS

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> The instant ruin of his country may redound to the hero's glory; yet had he balanced the consequences of submission and resistance, a patriot perhaps would have declined the unequal contest which must depend on the life and genius of one man. Scanderberg might indeed be supported by the rational, though fallacious, hope, that the Pope, the King of Naples and the Venetian Republic would join in the defence of a free and Christian people who guarded the sea coast of the Adriatic and the narrow passage from Greece to Italy.
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> GIBBON: *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* (Chapter LXVII)

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669 643 701 THE affairs of the Albanian Nationalists drew swiftly on towards their crisis. On the 18th August Fikri Dine and General Prenk Previsi, the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, drove out from Tirana and were conducted to Abas Kupi's headquarters. It was only a few days since Fikri had cut off the funds and food supplies of the Zogists in a last attempt to compel Abas Kupi's submission to his government. Now he and the General were come almost as suppliants to confess their failure to obtain arms or money from the Germans and their conviction that there was nothing more to be hoped for from a policy of "collaboration". They had played the German card against the Partisans and lost. Now they turned naturally to Abas Kupi to sound him as to his hopes of British support and to learn whether they might still save their skins by rallying to his cause.

669 186 This was the moment for which Abas Kupi had been waiting through all the years of his struggle in the mountains. In his eyes the creation of a resistance movement and the search for an agreement with the Allied Mission had been but

preparations for the day when he could call all Albanians to a general revolt against an enemy too weak ever to regain the initiative. Then, but only then, the military advantage would lie with the insurgents, and the ravages of war would be redeemed by the fruits of victory: power for the leaders and loot for the rank and file. Once before, at the time of the collapse of Italy, he had believed that the time had come and had thrown all his forces into a general revolt. Then, if events had favoured the guerillas, he might have been the arbiter of Albania's destinies, for he had been strong in his own following and had held the balance of power between the Ballists and the Partisans. In those days he had meant to give the "collaborationists" short shrift; but since then the civil war had taken a heavy toll of his strength, and he was now in no position to reject reinforcements from whatever quarter they might come. Fikri and his friends still represented a force to be reckoned with, and, in the eyes of many, their "collaboration" had been all but justified by the fear of Communism which had inspired it. Besides, once they had joined him in the mountains, they would be in his power, and he would be the master. With their support he would make good the losses of the civil war and might hope to do great execution among the retreating Germans. Thereafter the British could no longer refuse him their help, and he would thus be strong enough to compel Enver Hoja to come to terms. 669* 186

Abas Kupi therefore proposed to his two visitors that the leaders of the Government and of the Balli Kombetar should leave Tirana with all their forces and join him in the mountains to attack the Germans. If they complied he would give them his protection and allocate to them a share of such supplies as he might receive from the British. If they refused he would still take the field alone, but would then regard them as his enemies. All afternoon the three debated this proposal and the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief saw little alternative but to accept. Bitter experience, however, had taught them to distrust the friendship of Great Powers, and, before committing themselves to the precarious refuge of the mountains, they wanted to be sure that Abas Kupi's hopes of 669* 643 701

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British support were more likely of fulfilment than those which they had once founded upon the Germans. They asked, therefore, for assurances that the British command would support their operations with military supplies, and would view their defection to the Allied cause with favour. If the Agha could obtain such assurances from the British Mission they would accept his proposal, and he might count on them as on his own men.

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As soon as Fikri and the General were gone, Abas Kupi despatched a messenger to summon us to an urgent meeting. Accordingly we set out in Ihsan's carriage on the following evening, and, driving through the night along dusty cart tracks, reached the lonely farm-house where the Agha slept. The hour was too late for discussions, but next morning we went out together to a cool and shaded apple orchard where the master of the house had spread bright-coloured rugs for our conference. There Abas Kupi told us of his meeting with the "collaborationist" leaders and declared himself ready, despite the civil war, to attack the Germans as soon as we should give the assurances which Fikri had required. His proposal corresponded closely to our own most sanguine expectations, but we heard him with affected reserve; for we could not tell what would be the reactions of the staff officers in Bari. We saw, however, that the Agha himself was excited by the prospect of action, and to allay his impatience at once drew up a report for our Headquarters which was enciphered and transmitted in his presence. In this we admitted that British encouragement for the projected concentration of Nationalists under Abas Kupi's command might feed fuel to the flames of civil war. At the same time we were sure that it would contribute to the discomfiture of the Germans, who might otherwise make good their retreat through North Albania with little loss. We also pointed out that the entry of the Nationalists into the war against Germany would provide us with a last opportunity for intervening to stop the civil war and to prevent the incorporation of Albania in the Soviet system.

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When our business was done and we had eaten we left the orchard and went our several ways: Abas Kupi to Kurbenesh to negotiate alliances with its chiefs; Ihsan to Tirana to keep

in touch with the political leaders; and Maclean to Vorre to 000
reconnoitre the German ammunition dumps. I prepared meanwhile to return with Davis to Mukai, but our departure was delayed by the discovery that our mules had been stolen. Towards evening, however, I managed to borrow substitutes, and, loading the wireless set and batteries on one of these, joined Smiley and Said in the small hours of 21st August. Maclean returned next day; but our hopes of rest were intercepted by the intelligence of a Partisan advance, and we moved, therefore, into the neighbourhood of Kruya. It was quite a short march but agonizing for Said, who was stricken by a sharp attack of malaria. The poor fellow, indeed, was so ill that he had to be supported in the saddle; and that evening, alarmed by his condition, we sent into Kruya for a doctor.

The city of Skanderbeg could boast of only two physicians, 759
and the first of these declined our courier's invitation for fear of the Germans. The second, however, accepted without hesitation, saying that at his age he was afraid of no one. He [165]
was, indeed, a hundred and eight years old, but sat his horse like a young man and made light of a two hours' ride through the mountains. His drooping, tobacco-stained moustache suggested that abstinence was not the secret of his longevity; and at lunch, when he ate meat and drank wine with the rest of us, he told us that he had been married five times. The old mountaineer obviously enjoyed the adventure and told us that he was glad to be able to help the enemies of the Germans. Despite his years, the desire for revenge still smouldered in him, and he explained that the Austrians had shot two of his grandsons in the last war. He was delighted, moreover, to attend Said and recalled that, as a medical officer, he had served under one of his ancestors in the Turkish army. He had learnt his medicine in Istanbul in the seventies of the last century, and was ignorant of later developments in the art of healing. Nevertheless his potions revived Said, and he successfully relieved minor ailments in others of our party.

Meanwhile, throughout the Balkans, the revolution of 669*
events proceeded with ever-increasing momentum. On 24th 648

August Roumania declared against the Germans; and on the following day Bulgaria sued for an armistice. In two days Hitler's empire had been stripped of two of its provinces; and, by a natural process, the news of these defections excited the emulation of the Albanian leaders. On the evening of 26th August Ihsan Toptani arrived in our camp with an urgent message from Nureddin Vlora. This was to tell us that a joint meeting of the leaders of the Government and of the Balli Kombetar had unanimously endorsed Fikri Dine's provisional agreement with Abas Kupi. We reported the news at once to our Headquarters, and late in the night of 27th August received their reply. It authorised us to inform Abas Kupi that, although the British authorities had little confidence in Fikri Dine and his associates, they would be prepared to reconsider their attitude towards these men if they now gave positive proofs of their intention to fight the Germans. The Agha's own good-will had already been acquired by a decision to supply him with arms in proportion to his actions; and we might now expect that this latest instruction would also satisfy the demands of the "collaborationists". That same night, therefore, we despatched a courier to Abas Kupi to arrange for a meeting.

Next day, anticipating his reply, we went down into the plain to another farm of Ihsan Toptani's in the region of Topise. There, in the evening, five men from Abas Kupi's bodyguard came for us and drove us by truck back across the plain in the direction of Kruya. We had covered perhaps ten miles when our driver pulled up beside two Zogist sentries standing by the road. We climbed down from the truck and were directed through the maize fields towards a farm-house. There we found the Agha seated on a log in the orchard, while a score of his guards rested beneath the trees.

We exchanged the customary greetings, and, after we had drunk coffee together, Maclean gave him assurances that we should send him supplies in proportion to his actions, and that we should be prepared to reconsider our attitude towards the "collaborationists" if they now declared against the Germans. Then, convinced that this was the Agha's last chance, he told

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him that unless the Zogists attacked the Germans at once, our Mission would be withdrawn. Stung by this ultimatum and the lack of confidence which it implied, the Agha reminded us sharply of the shortcomings of our own Headquarters. They had failed to secure instructions for him from King Zog; they had failed to take advantage of his offer to meet the Partisan leaders; and they had never fulfilled the agreement we had concluded with him in July for supplying his forces with arms. Worse still, they had refused to give him any assurances for the future of Albania's frontiers, and had deliberately abandoned the policy of mediation between the rival parties to the civil war initiated by the Smith Mission. His arguments were strong, but we declined to discuss what we could not defend, and the Agha grew silent, seeing that we were not to be drawn. For several moments he sat downcast, plucking at the grass, and then, looking up, said quietly:

"I will give your message to Fikri Dine and his friends: let them join me if they will. For my part I have decided to attack Durazzo within three days."

For fully a minute none of us spoke as we turned over in our minds the significance of his words. Durazzo was the chief port and second city of Albania; and it was there that Abas Kupi had first raised the standard of resistance against the Italian invaders. To capture Durazzo now, at the outset of the campaign, would revenge the glorious defeat of 1939 and bring fresh lustre to the Agha's tarnished laurels. It would, moreover, open sea communications with Italy, and might enable us to run in military supplies in bulk and even to obtain the support of a Commando. It still remained to be seen whether the Zogist forces were equal to the enterprise, but we decided to give the attempt every encouragement. Maclean therefore promised our support, and we shook hands with the Agha in token of agreement.

To give practical effect to his resolve, Abas Kupi now issued orders for all available Zogist forces to concentrate in the region of Preza. Then, that his main effort might be promoted by diversions elsewhere, he wrote to his confederates among the Catholic chiefs of the North, bidding them stand by

*669 to attack the Germans. Meanwhile, leaving Maclean and
648 myself at Topise, Smiley set out with Zogist guides to reconnoitre the approaches to Durazzo.

643 That night, when we had gone, Fikri Dine, General Prenk
701 Previsi, and representatives of the Balli Kombetar drove out from Tirana to the Agha's headquarters to learn of our reply. Their discussions lasted through the night, but before dawn the die was cast. They returned to the capital, and, at noon on the 29th August, Fikri Dine announced the resignation of his government in a proclamation which declared that his efforts to save Albania from Communism had been frustrated by the total absence of German support.

The resignation of the government was the signal for the political leaders to disperse, and completed the isolation of the Germans. They sought to persuade, and at length to compel, the loyalty of their former associates, but when they struck the birds had already flown. Fikri Dine made his way to Dibra, hoping to raise the tribes to his support, but the Partisans were already masters of the region, and the chiefs who had been his friends had gone over to the winning side. For some days he wandered as an outlaw through the lands he had once swayed; but his utmost efforts only rallied to his cause some two hundred men, the remnants of the Dibran gendarmerie. With these he then retired through Mirdita to the Catholic region of Kurbenesh, which lies to the west of Mati. Kurbenesh was the seat of Prenk Previsi's influence, and there Fikri found the general with a body of picked officers and men of the Albanian army. Their combined following was less than five hundred strong — all that remained of the Albanian armed forces.

*669 The Ballist leaders meanwhile hesitated to entrust them-
665 selves to the Gheg chieftains and went into hiding near, or even in, Tirana, to wait until their forces should arrive from the South. Midhat Frasheri and Ali Klissura were variously reported held or shot by the Germans, but when the smoke of rumour cleared it was found that they were in Shiyak. There Abas Ermenye, the movement's energetic military commander, was concentrating the remnants of the Ballist forces, which presently amounted to some eight hundred men.

which presently amounted to some eight hundred men. 000

In Tirana the Germans sought desperately for friends 727
among the Albanians; at last, on 6th September, they succeeded 643
in forming the shadow of a government under the presidency of Ibrahim Bey Bichaku. The new administration, however, could not rely on a hundred men; and Ibrahim was recommended for office solely by the affection of the German Minister, with whom he played ping-pong every day. As if to mock the impotence of this government Mustafa Kruya, the "arch-collaborationist", now left for Vienna, never to return. Only Jon Marko Joni still hesitated, but he too abandoned the capital and retired to Scutari to watch the fortunes of the Zogists. The days of "collaboration" were over, and Tirana was become nothing but a German redoubt.

Meanwhile the Moslem North was up in arms. The 669*
Partisans had overrun Dibra; and the Dibran chiefs, many of them former "collaborationists", had been won over to the L.N.C. by their own incomparable opportunism and the wise diplomacy of Mustafa Jinishi. Tsen Elezi and Dan Kalloshi abandoned the Double Eagle for the Red Star; and, under Partisan direction, their forces were variously engaged in the civil war or the war of liberation. Further north in Liuma Muharrem Bairaktar had already taken the field in the last days of August. He had prepared his attack for some weeks and was finally stung to action by an ultimatum from the German commander in Kukes, who demanded the surrender of two Austrian officers who had deserted from their regiment and had sought his protection. The Partisans had not yet entered Liuma, but Muharrem had already conferred with Mustafa Jinishi, and, though he declined to join the L.N.C., he had agreed to full military co-operation with their forces.

But the fiercest struggle against the Germans in all Albania 186
was led by Gani Kryeziu and his brother, Hassan, with the 669*
help of Simcox and his Mission. Since the end of July Gani had been receiving arms from our Headquarters; and the communiqués of his operations were broadcast in the Albanian transmissions of Radio Bari. His influence grew with his successes and the knowledge that he enjoyed British support;

*269 [186] and he soon rallied to his cause the chiefs of Krasniqi, Puka, and Hass. Meanwhile, stirred by the news of his exploits, volunteers from all over Albania, many of them former officers, or men disappointed with both Zogists and Partisans, made their way to Jakova to serve under his banner; and his forces were still further swollen by deserters from the "collaborationist" army and even from the "Kosmet" Partisans. Throughout the month of August Gani's men were continually engaged against the Germans, and, on the 19th of the month, he led them in person in a full-scale attack against the chrome mines of Kam and Kepenek. In this action the working of the mines was sabotaged, several prisoners were captured, and more than a hundred slave workers released; and Gani was only driven back by strong German units, equipped with armoured cars and artillery.

The North was still free from civil war, but, though Gani continued to treat the "Kosmet" Partisans as his allies, their relations grew increasingly strained. As Communists the "Kosmet" leaders had always been suspicious of Gani's pro-British leanings, nor could they reconcile his policy of winning back the Kossovo for Albania with their allegiance to Marshal Tito. While both had been fighting for their lives these had been matters of small moment, but now that victory was at hand the Partisans began to look on Gani more as a rival than as an ally. Gani, on his side, resented their repeated failure to join him against the Germans, and found his efforts to win over doubtful chiefs continually frustrated by their provocative attitude. Taught by experience, we had long since warned our Headquarters that the time might come when the Partisans would turn against Gani; and indeed they now began to press him to join their movement. Gani, however, declined their invitations as often as they were made, and in this he was supported by our Headquarters, who undertook to "take a strong line" with the L.N.C. should they seek to compel his adherence.

The scene was thus set for a general rising of all Albanians from the borders of Greece to those of Montenegro, and already the resistance movements had mustered powerful

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forces. The Partisans numbered by this time more than twenty thousand men, dispersed over South and Central Albania. In Kruya Abas Kupi still commanded some two thousand five hundred men, and, with his Catholic confederates, the Ballists, and the remnants of the government troops, this total was increased to as many as five thousand. North of the Drin, Gani's forces exceeded two thousand men ; and in Liuma, Muharrem Bairaktar had raised perhaps half as many. The Nationalists, therefore, already numbered some eight thousand men, and, if Jon Marko Joni should finally decide to join them, this figure would be brought to eleven thousand. The total array of the guerillas thus surpassed thirty thousand men ; and, if the Nationalists were inferior to the Partisans in numbers and equipment, they nevertheless commanded the German lines of retreat through North Albania. Had both sides now joined forces they might, with the help of British supplies and technicians, have closed all the roads leading out of the country. The Germans would then have had no choice but to surrender or else abandon their heavy war material and take to the mountains in the forlorn hope of fighting their way to safety.

Every military interest demanded at least the suspension of the civil war ; but once again, just as Abas Kupi had decided to take the offensive, Enver Hoja moved to sabotage his plans. The victory of the Partisans had seemed assured, but, now that Abas Kupi prepared to attack the Germans, Enver Hoja rightly feared that British support might still save the Zogists from defeat. To guard against this danger he proposed to strike at the British Mission with the Zogists, judging that, if we were once removed, our Headquarters would be deprived of their only means of sending supplies to the Agha or of learning of his circumstances. Accordingly, as Commander-in-Chief and head of the self-appointed Provisional Government of Albania, Enver Hoja sent for the British liaison officer at his headquarters and delivered an ultimatum to him demanding the immediate withdrawal of our Mission. This stated that we were working with " Abas Kupi and other traitors " against the Partisans, and that he no longer regarded us as allied officers but as " agents of foreign reaction ". Furthermore, *669 unless we were withdrawn from Albania within five days, patrols would be sent out to capture us and bring us to trial before a Partisan court-martial.

That Enver Hoja should thus have dared to impugn the good faith of British officers, let alone to threaten their arrest and trial, is eloquent of the hostility, or at least the contempt which he felt for the British authorities. He had rashly chosen, however, to deliver his ultimatum at a time when his delegates in Bari were negotiating an agreement with the British Command. The terms which they had obtained were unexpectedly favourable, but our outraged staff officers now broke off discussions, declaring that they would not ratify the agreement until Enver Hoja had withdrawn his allegations and his ultimatum. For some days relations between the Partisan Government and our Headquarters were strained, but our staff officers remained unyielding, and at last Enver Hoja climbed down and gave reluctant assurances for the honourable treatment of all British officers in Albania. The incident was thus closed to the satisfaction of our Headquarters, but, despite Enver Hoja's apparent submission, the real victory was to the Partisans. They had succeeded in creating the impression in Bari that support of the Zogists must involve further "unpleasantness"; and once our Headquarters had ratified the agreement with them the fear of "unpleasantness" became a powerful cause of appeasement.

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829 Politics is not yet an exact science, and many of our staff officers still clung to the hope that Enver Hoja's intransigence would be moderated by opposition from within the L.N.C. In the last week of August, however, Mustafa Jinishi, Enver Hoja's only serious rival, was killed in an ambush in Dibra. Mustafa had been a Communist, but had suffered from a peculiarly Albanian brand of deviation. He had subscribed to the doctrine that the ruling classes must be dispossessed of the ownership of the means of production, but had believed that this principle could hardly be applied to the tribal society of the Ghegs. There the means of production were already owned in common by the tribe, and the authority of the chiefs

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was derived not from ownership, but rather from personal qualities, tradition, or subsidies received from abroad. Mustafa had therefore considered that education, health, and administration were the chief requirements of a community whose economic structure was not of itself an obstacle to the Revolution. These theoretical conclusions had suggested a policy of gradualism, and in this he had been fortified by more practical considerations. The strength of Albania lay in the mountains; and Mustafa knew that, even if the Partisans occupied Tirana, they could only compel the submission of the tribes with the help of foreign troops. His patriotic instinct recoiled from such an expedient; and he considered, besides, that a population of only a million could ill afford the employment of violent means to attain an end which a Marxist interpretation of history showed to be in any case inevitable. He had therefore concluded that the Albanian Communist Party must persuade where it could not profitably compel, and had thus envisaged a period of prolonged co-operation with the Nationalist chiefs.

The study of the divergences of opinion within the Communist Party, as within the Early Church, is more amusing than instructive; and Mustafa Jinishi's position is perhaps best described by saying that, while he had regarded the United Front as a strategy, Enver Hoja thought of it only as tactics. In infinity the two are indistinguishable, but here below the difference is a fruitful source of controversy. Already in Belgrade Mustafa had advocated Communist collaboration with Abas Kupi and Gani Kryeziu. Later, as a member of the Central Council of the L.N.C., he had played a prominent part in winning non-Communist support for the Partisan cause. In the early days Enver Hoja had welcomed his efforts for tactical reasons, and it was not until the time of the Italian armistice that the breach between them had become open. Then, at Abas Kupi's instance, Mustafa had concluded the agreement at Mukai for a military alliance with the Ballists; but Enver Hoja had branded the agreement as Right Wing deviation, and had persuaded the Central Council to withhold its ratification. Thereafter Mustafa's influence in the movement had declined, and, alone of the members of the

665 Central Council, he had not been given office when the Partisan Provisional Government had been formed at the end of May 1944. Instead, he had been sent as the Government's delegate to the Northern Army, where his efforts to reconcile the Nationalist leaders might still serve Enver Hoja's ends. It had indeed been largely as a result of Mustafa's patient diplomacy that Tsen Elezi, Dan Kalloshi, and other Dibran notables came over to the Partisans; and the cordial relations which he had established with Muharrem Bairaktar had encouraged the Nationalists to believe that he was still working for an understanding with them. It is probable that he was; and indeed almost his last action had been to prepare for a meeting with Gani Kryeziu, his friend and protector in Belgrade.

627 Mystery still surrounds Mustafa's[1] death. The fatal ambush occurred some distance from the front; and, though he had with him several guards, no one ever saw his assailants or heard of them thereafter. Dibra is the land of ambushes, but many still believe that Mustafa was done to death on Enver Hoja's orders. Certain, is only that his work perished with him, and that, after his death, the Partisans no longer sought to reach an understanding with any of the Gheg chiefs.

We were sitting with Abas Kupi and Said when a courier brought the news of Mustafa's fate. Said wept, and the Agha said to us sadly:

"He was my friend, and a great patriot."

2

*669 AFTER Abas Kupi had told us of his decision to attack Durazzo, Maclean and I had returned with Ihsan to his farm at Topise. There we had tested and cleaned our weapons, destroyed superfluous documents, and sought to reduce the weight and bulk of our baggage. Whatever was left over was now confided to the Italian contingent of our Mission, who were constituted into a rear headquarters, despite the protest of their two officers who wanted to fight at our side. Having thus prepared ourselves for the battle, we drove with Ihsan to Luz, near the

[1] [Mustafa Jinishi, rival of Enver Hoja -- Analyst]

Zogist headquarters, and were lodged in the house of a Catholic 669* notable who simultaneously enjoyed the friendship of his priest and the possession of three wives. There, on 30th August, we were visited by Abas Kupi, who attached his son, Petrit, to our Mission as a pledge of his friendship and sincerity.

The Agha was still engaged in concentrating his forces, and we therefore moved westward with Petrit into the region watered by the river Ishm. There we encamped by a broad meadow on the fringe of a wood of tall beech trees and awaited Smiley's return and supplies from Italy.

Now that Abas Kupi had decided to fight, Said felt that his mission was accomplished and that the time had come for him to rejoin his brother. The main body of the L.N.C. might soon come into contact with Gani's forces; and Said still hoped that his personal friendship with the Partisan leaders might smooth the path of negotiations and help to promote understanding between them. The problem of the Kossovo, moreover, was his closest interest; and he knew that the fate of the region might be settled in the first days after the withdrawal of the Germans. He therefore asked Abas Kupi for guides, and set out north-eastwards into the mountains of Mirdita. We were sad to see him go, but his work with us was finished and we knew that his decision was right.

Our days in the beechwood were tormented by a plague 000 of wasps, but our nights were cheered by a store of Scotch whisky which Ihsan, ever attentive to our wants, had discovered in Tirana. Between these two extremes of physical annoyance and satisfaction I amused my leisure with reading d'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco*. The extravagance of language and emotion which had startled and delighted the solid world before 1914 was perhaps rather lost on me amid the harsh realities of guerilla life. Something in the book, however, touched me, and for the first time in six months awoke a faint nostalgia for civilisation. It was perhaps incongruous reading, but d'Annunzio had also been a guerilla, and I recalled, besides, that Bonaparte had read *Werther* beneath the Pyramids, and enjoyed it.

727 In the panic frenzy of defeat the Germans lashed out in all directions, arresting harmless townsmen on the mere suspicion of being Partisans, Zogists, or Ballists. They were too demoralised, however, to hunt the guerillas any longer, and we could now move freely in the plain, except along the coast or in the towns. The defection of the " collaborationists " was followed by that of the Albanians in German employment, and we were visited one night by a young man of good family who was the chief interpreter to the *Gestapo*. A tall, dark fellow, with his uniform cap set at a rakish angle, his jack-boots highly polished and a cigarette hanging from his lips, he might have been the villain in a melodrama. He spoke English, indeed, with a peculiarly *villainous* accent, but drew for us a vivid picture of the confusion in Tirana, concealing his own fears behind a mask of irony. Now, when they most needed unity, the German commanders were torn by intrigues and recriminations. Their despair, moreover, had induced in them a mood of romanticism, and they vied with one another to win personal popularity by distributing autographed telescopes and pistols to their Albanian friends. The Albanian gendarmes and officials had disappeared, and the only remaining evidence of political activity was the German Minister's daily game of ping-pong with Ibrahim Bichaku. Meanwhile the *Luftwaffe* headquarters were besieged with staff officers demanding passages to Germany.

Yet, despite this apparent confusion, the Germans pressed on with their preparations for retreat; and Merret, who was watching the Tirana–Scutari road, reported as many as two hundred trucks moving northwards in a single night. The general withdrawal had not yet been ordered, but officers and men knew that it was at hand and looked anxiously over their shoulders. And well they might, for the way home lay through Montenegro and Bosnia, and many feared that they might only escape from Albania to be done to death by Tito's Partisans. Guessing their mood, we judged that the time had come to carry the work of subversion into the ranks of the German army itself, and, through a hundred different channels, we now spread the wildest rumours among them, alternately raising and shattering their hopes. More particularly we renewed our efforts to recruit a striking force from their non-German troops, sending out two Turkish-speaking *hojas* to incite the Turkoman units on Cape Rodonit to revolt.

Meanwhile, with the help of Abas Kupi's organisation, we also penetrated the mind of the German Command. A young German officer who worked in the Operations Bureau of the Corps Headquarters in Tirana had confided in an Albanian friend that he did not mean to trust his life to the hazards of the retreat. He proposed instead to remain in Albania and had asked for advice as to where he might best hide himself. His friend was a Zogist, and, after devious negotiations, the German offered to supply us with exact details of the German Order of Battle and with advance copies of all Operational Orders. In return he asked us for a safe conduct, so that, when the Corps Headquarters were withdrawn, he might escape to our Mission, to be sent home as soon as the war was over and spared internment as a prisoner of war. We accepted his terms at once, and for the next two months were able to inform our Headquarters, and the R.A.F., of the intentions and daily movements of every company of German troops throughout Albania.

Smiley, meanwhile, had been reconnoitring the approaches 000
to Durazzo in the company of the Commandant of the Durazzo gendarmerie. He passed four German "check-posts" in the latter's car and then set out on foot with his interpreter, Halit Kola, to inspect the defences of the city. The two were thus busily engaged when they were stopped by a German patrol who asked for their identity cards. Halit produced a document of sorts which satisfied the Germans, but Smiley, having no papers, tried to bluff his way through by talking excitedly in Albanian. The corporal in charge of the patrol was stubborn, and, after a few moments' argument, Smiley turned his back on him and walked slowly away. The corporal drew his revolver and took aim; Smiley, unconscious of his danger, walked on. Halit waited breathless for the shot, but the German shook his head as if to say: "Why kill a poor Albanian peasant?" then with a shrug of his shoulders he put the weapon

000 back into its holster and went on with his rounds. Smiley continued the reconnaissance, which was not completed until the following evening. Someone, however, must have betrayed his presence to the Germans, for they threw a cordon round the area and prepared to institute a search. Warned in good time, Smiley dressed up as an Albanian gendarme and drove through the cordon in a truck. His driver stopped several times to pick up German hitch-hikers, and, thanks to their presence, the truck was waved on at each of the four "check-posts" without enquiries.

*669 Smiley reached our camp on the 1st September, and strongly advised us to abandon the idea of an attack on Durazzo. He agreed that Abas Kupi might capture the city from its present garrison, but was convinced that he could never hold it against a determined German counter-attack. The Germans, he reckoned, were sure to react vigorously; and, with their backs to the sea, the Zogist forces would be cut off from all hope of retreat and must be utterly destroyed. Abas Kupi joined us that evening, but was not easily persuaded to abandon a project which would make him master of the second city in Albania and might bring to his cause the moral and material support of the British Navy. After prolonged discussion, however, he yielded to Smiley's arguments and reluctantly agreed to our proposal to attack the Tirana–Scutari road instead. He left, therefore, for Preza, where he had established his headquarters, to explain the change of plans to his staff and to check the further concentration of Zogist troops before Durazzo. That night, after he was gone, we received our first aeroplane-load of military supplies from Bari. It consisted of explosives for the sabotage of the road.

The Agha returned from Preza on the afternoon of the 3rd September, and we held a council of war to determine our plan of campaign. There it was agreed that Abas Kupi with the main body of the Zogists, assisted by Maclean, Smiley, and Sergeant Jenkins, should establish himself on the plateau of Mount Kruya and thence operate against the Tirana–Scutari road. Merret, with Sergeant Jones, was to remain at Vorre to await a suitable opportunity of attacking the German petrol and ammunition dumps in concert with Zogist forces from Preza. Meanwhile I was to take Petrit and a small bodyguard to try to win over the Turkoman garrisons in the region of Cape Rodonit.

A thunderstorm interposed between the making and the execution of these plans; and, while we still sheltered from the rain, a Zogist patrol brought in two Turkoman deserters. From them we learned that at least one company had already taken to the woods and that their whole battalion was on the verge of mutiny. We now reversed our plans once more and decided to march together towards the coast to organise the deserters and make ourselves masters of Cape Rodonit. The Agha readily agreed, for, with a strong Turkoman force, it might still be possible to take and hold Durazzo. That same night, therefore, we struck camp and, crossing the plain under cover of darkness, climbed into the low range of hills which follows the line of the coast southwards from Cape Rodonit.

The rain ceased as we marched, and the moon had already come out from behind the clouds when, towards midnight, we topped the escarpment that rises on the west of the plain of Kruya. There we divided our forces the better to round up the Turkoman deserters; Maclean and Smiley went with Abas Kupi to the village of Mazjhe; and Petrit and I made our way towards Ishm, where it was believed that we should find the ringleaders of the mutiny. We reached Ishm before dawn and took up our quarters in the house of a venerable *haji* — the only one I met in Albania — who had decorated his living-room with scrolls and crude lithographs brought back from the Pilgrimage. The Turkoman deserters were said to be hiding in the forest some distance away; and it was past six o'clock when our scouts returned with four of their spokesmen. They were still dressed in German uniform, but had torn off their regimental badges and now demonstrated their hatred of the Germans in a fearsome pantomime. One of them was a lance-corporal and was referred to as *Marechal* by the others, who were ordinary troopers. They were darker skinned than most Europeans, but there was little of the Mongolian about their features. One of them indeed, a boy called Achmet, *669 might have stepped out of a Persian oil-painting, with his ruddy cheeks and thick, arched brows meeting over black, almond-shaped eyes.

Language was our first difficulty, and their knowledge of Russian was almost as slender as my own. By dint, however, of patience, sign language, and the free interpolation of Albanian, Italian, Serbian, and German words, we succeeded in the end in making each other understood. The four were Tajiks from a Turkoman battalion consisting of one Tajik and three Kazak companies. They had been in touch with one of our Turkish-speaking agents, and the night before had killed their German officers and taken to the woods. As yet only the Tajik company had mutinied, but their spokesmen were convinced that the Kazaks were also ripe for revolt. That same morning, therefore, we dressed up Achmet in Albanian clothes and sent him to stir up the nearest Kazak company to kill their officers and join the Tajiks. Achmet fulfilled his mission with conspicuous success, and a few days later I was awakened by the arrival in our camp of a group of small Mongolian men in German uniform. Their leader knelt down before me and untied a big, green handkerchief which he spread out on the ground. In it were six ears.

" Germans," he said, and smiling, drew a finger across his throat.

After the mutiny of the Kazaks the Germans disarmed the remaining Turkoman companies and rounded up a number of the deserters. In the course of a week, however, we succeeded in organising a striking force about a hundred strong, of whom some thirty were Tajiks and the rest Kazaks. They came to us fully armed and equipped, and the Tajiks brought with them two light machine-guns. Like the Turkomans we had seen with Neel, our Tajiks and Kazaks had served in the Red army and had variously deserted to, or been captured by, the Germans. For a time they had endured the hardships of imprisonment, but then, seduced by the offer of military privileges, had volunteered for garrison duties in the German army. They had thus been formed into a Turkoman battalion and had already seen service in France and in Yugoslavia.

Soon after the Tajiks had joined us two of their spokesmen formed up to us one morning and complained that their *Marechal*, or N.C.O., had used them badly when they were in the German army. We were just about to hold a council of war with Abas Kupi, and sent them away, saying that we would hear their complaint in the afternoon. They saluted and marched off, but an hour or so later, while we were still discussing plans, a shot rang out, and we heard the sound of rhythmic hand-clapping and of a song of triumph. An Albanian guard ran up shouting: "*Ka Vdek, Ka Vdek*" (literally "He has death"); and, hurrying to the camp, we found the Tajiks standing in a ring, singing and clapping their hands while the handsome Achmet danced a dance of victory round the corpse of the murdered *Marechal*. As a ballet it was splendid, but as discipline . . . and here I saw Sergeant Jones look meaningly at Sergeant Jenkins; for N.C.O.s are also an international fraternity.

We suspected that the Tajiks had murdered their Russian officers to desert to the Germans, and we knew that they had murdered their German officers to desert to us. It was now borne in upon us that we were become their officers; and, as we stood looking at the corpse of their *Marechal*, I ruefully reflected that from repetition to habit is but a step. The Tajiks were friendly and respectful, but so, no doubt, had been the Janissaries in their time. We therefore determined that, since the cheerful fellows must presently compare us with our Russian and German predecessors, the comparison should be favourable enough.

We ordered the burial of the *Marechal*, and, since we could not judge his guilt or innocence, thought his liquidation best forgotten. We declined, however, the invidious task of selecting his successor and left the choice to the chances of a democratic election. For a time all went well, but when the Kazaks began to murmur against the new *Marechal* we hastily deposed him while he yet lived. By this time we had brought the force under control, and the N.C.O. whom we then appointed retained our confidence and the obedience of the men until the end.

669 We presently organised the Turkomans into three squadrons, one of Tajiks and two of Kazaks. Each squadron had its own leader, who was responsible to the *Marechal*, or N.C.O. The *Marechal*, in his turn, was supervised by Ivan and Mishka I. The two Russians were fair but rather rough with the Turkomans, whom they openly despised as "natives". We had indeed already seen traces of this Blimpish attitude in their relations with the Albanians, but we did not discourage it, for it ensured that their allegiance was to us rather than to their Asiatic compatriots. Meanwhile the experience of fighting against the Germans under our leadership brought us the personal loyalty of the Turkomans; and we soon won their affection by our natural interest in their ways.

Since schooldays I have felt the lure of Central Asia, pored over the exploits of Genghiz Khan and Tamerlane, and dreamed of the glories of Samarkand and Bokhara. Maclean shared this romanticism; and now, by a freak of war, the daydreams of boyhood came true and we rode at the head of a Turkoman horde. Our Tajiks were horsemen from the steppe and highlanders from the Pamir — a gay, fiery, and volatile people. They spoke a dialect of Persian, and, though their blood was mixed, the Indo-Aryan strain prevailed over the Mongolian. Tajikistan had never been wholly pacified by the Tsars and was the last of the Russian lands to submit to the Soviets. Collectivisation only came in the late thirties, and had been fiercely resisted. Our men told us that there were still guerillas in the Pamir, and some of them claimed to have relations who had fled from the Russians to settle in Persia or Afghanistan. Resentment against Russia still smouldered among them, and they had not forgotten the destruction of their great herds of horses which had followed the Kremlin's decision to check their nomad wanderings and force them to till the soil. Their physique was good, and most of them could read and write, but, though Soviet rule had brought them great benefits, they spoke with regret of the Emirates they had never known.

The Tajiks were friendly from the start; the Kazaks smiling, but more reserved. They were Turki-speaking and

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[-2762-]

ACHMET

OUR TAJIK COOK

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SMILEY, THE AUTHOR, AND TURKOMAN DESERTERS

A KAZAK PATROL

[-276a-]

000 of Mongolian stock; a dour people, slow to action and slow to complaint. They had known both Tsarist and Soviet rule, and, unlike the Tajiks, sometimes spoke of themselves as Russians. Collectivisation had come to them early, and, while they enjoyed its fruit, they had already forgotten the hardships of its early days. They seemed to have accepted Russia and might be counted good Soviet citizens.

Sometimes at night, when they gathered round their fires to roast or boil their evening sheep, the Turkomans would sing and dance for us. At first they sang shyly and only Red army marching songs; later, when they came to trust us, they threw off the mask and sang their own songs and danced their own dances. The Kazaks made the best choir, with sad laments of the steppe which sounded both of Asia and of Europe. There was also an Uzbeg among them; an ugly fellow, but perhaps the best singer of them all. Uzbeg songs were like Turkish, but simpler, with the crystal purity of a mountain stream. Tajik songs had a wild gaiety; and the Tajik highlanders from the Pamir were the best dancers of all, with their whirling reels and triumphant sword-dances. It was Prince Igor with the Kruya mountains for a back-cloth, and lit only by the camp fires and the moon.

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*669 On the 4th September, while we were dispersed over the coastal range, rounding up the Turkoman deserters, the Partisans crossed the Kruya mountains, and, raiding down towards the plain, burnt the Zogist headquarters at Luz. The Agha would have marched off at once to engage them, but he had given us his word to attack the Germans; and Maclean could not release him from this promise. Our Headquarters were already growing impatient; and indeed the morning brought a message from Bari urging us to "do utmost get Kupi fight". Torn between the need to defend and the duty to attack, the Agha adopted a strategy of compromise: he sent Billal Kola with a small force to resist the Partisans, and

*669 assigned some hundred men to Maclean for operations against the Germans. Meanwhile he remained himself at Mazjhe, holding the bulk of his troops in reserve.

I was at this time some five hours' march from Mazjhe, in the village of Kurat, with twenty-eight Tajiks and some forty Albanians under Petrit. There, on the afternoon of the 5th September, I was joined by Maclean and Smiley with a force of a hundred and fifty Zogists commanded by Ndue Palli, a Catholic chieftain and former Captain of Gendarmerie, who had fought with Abas Kupi at Durazzo. Ndue was tall and lean, with a sorrowful yet questing look, and a way of walking which reminded us irresistibly of a bloodhound on the scent. He proved, however, a pleasant and resourceful companion and a loyal ally.

725 Petrit[1] and I had already planned to attack a German post that night,[2] but now that Maclean had come with reinforcements we decided to wait until the following day, when our combined forces might attempt a more serious operation. In the evening, therefore, we held a council of war and chose for our target a German Battery Headquarters which was commended by its lonely situation and the belief that it contained large supplies of ammunition.

We slept perhaps four hours, and then, with a small bodyguard set out into the night to reconnoitre the German positions. After an hour's march through the woods our guide turned aside from the path and led us uphill to a rounded summit tufted with a clump of trees. As the night faded out of the sky we saw that we were standing on a range of barren hills, running roughly north and south. Beyond us to the west, and perhaps two thousand yards away, ran another range parallel to our own, but lower and thickly wooded. The fold of ground between lay under a blanket of mist, through which gleamed a single light — the duty office of the enemy's camp. Taking advantage of the obscurity we now crawled some five hundred yards downhill to a projecting knoll, where we crouched in the bracken and waited, chilled and cramped, to watch the Germans awake.

After what seemed an age the sun rose behind us, and, as

[1] [i.e. Petrit Kupi, son of Zogist leader -- Analyst]
[2] [in mid-August 1944 -- Analyst]

the mists parted, we saw that a road ran along the bottom between the two ranges. Beside the road, and perhaps four hundred feet below us, stood a wooden hut, where the solitary light still burned. Beyond, in the side of the wooded range opposite, we presently made out three or four barracks or store-houses. As yet no one stirred, but towards six o'clock a German soldier emerged from the lighted hut and stamped up and down on the road, blowing on his hands. Presently he turned into the wood, and a few minutes later a bugle sounded the *réveillé*. This was the moment for which we had waited, for we hoped that the movements of the men would reveal the positions of the camp. We therefore searched the wood closely through our glasses, and, as the soldiers woke up and set about their several routines, we became aware of a number of camouflaged tents and dug-outs which had thus far escaped our notice.

At seven o'clock six lorries drove up from the south and were loaded up from what we guessed to be a store-house by a working party of Italians, supervised by a German N.C.O. The drivers manœuvred clumsily on the narrow road, and once one of them backed his lorry into the ditch. His angry shouts were wafted up to us on the hillside, but, with the help of the Italians, his machine was presently righted; and by eight o'clock the whole convoy had driven away. Each of us drew a rough sketch of all that he saw, and tried, besides, to count the number of the enemy. This proved a harder task, for the soldiers were continually disappearing and reappearing among the trees; but we finally computed the strength of the garrison at some thirty men. Towards nine o'clock the activity of the camp subsided; and, feeling that we had seen enough, we crawled back infinitely slowly to the shelter of the clump of trees on the ridge above. There, with the enemy positions still in full view, we sat down to concert our plan of attack.

We decided to assemble our forces behind the eastern range two hours before dark, and, dividing them into three parts, to develop a pincer movement against the Battery Headquarters. Maclean, with Petrit, Ndue Palli, and a hundred Zogists would cross the bottom to the right of the German positions and approach them from the north. At the same time I would

725 take our twenty-eight Tajiks as the other arm of the pincer and carry out a similar manœuvre, but from the south. Maclean would launch the attack with the Albanians; and, once the Germans were fully engaged, I was to fall on them from behind with the Tajiks. Smiley, meanwhile, would remain on the eastern range with a reserve of some forty Albanians and three machine-guns. With these he would keep the road covered and might complete the discomfiture of the enemy should they try to escape eastwards. Finally, a small group of Albanians were to burn down a wooden bridge on the road, three kilometres from the camp, to prevent the enemy from receiving early reinforcements.

Back at Kurat the day passed slowly, though not without incident. This was the morning when the Tajiks murdered their N.C.O.; a deed which convinced us that, after the excitement of mutiny, their temper urgently required the discipline of battle and the cold douche of danger. Abas Kupi came also to discuss plans; and towards midday we received the first report from the young German officer in the Corps Headquarters in Tirana. This gave us, among a mass of other information, the identifications of the post we were going to attack. It was the headquarters of the Third Battery of the 297th Artillery Regiment. With so much business, there was no time to rest before the action; and, almost as soon as we had eaten, we set out to join our forces, already concentrating behind the eastern range. We reached the assembly point at five o'clock, and climbed to the crest of the range for a further brief reconnaissance. All was quiet in the German camp; we wished each other good luck, and departed each to his allotted task.

In the morning I had agreed with a light heart to take command of the Tajiks, but, as we marched off to the attack, I was oppressed by sombre reflections. I knew nothing of their training or their ways, and spoke besides so little of their language that I could not hope to make them understand my orders in the heat of battle. This ignorance might jeopardise the whole operation; but, as I anxiously considered how to impose my will on these wild Asiatics, there suddenly came

725

back to me a fragment from a long-forgotten conversation with a friend who had once commanded an Indian brigade:

"It doesn't matter what you say to native troops," he had told me, "because they won't understand you. What matters is what you do. March in front of them and they'll do whatever you do; and, if you don't run away, they'll be as good as the Guards."

I had been in Cairo at the time, ill from jaundice, and had forgotten his words with the next glass of medicine. Now, by some strange freak of memory, the sick-bed talk was become a counsel of action; and I remembered that Ivan and Mishka at least considered the Tajiks as "native troops". I went, therefore, to the head of the column, though not without some apprehension; the danger from the Germans in front might be part of the day's work; but only that morning the Tajiks had murdered their N.C.O., and I had to steel myself not to look back too often over my shoulder.

We crossed the low ground, where a tongue of woodland stretched out from the western range, and, hurrying over the road, climbed on to the crest of the range itself. There we turned northwards, and, devoutly hoping that the Germans were off their guard, moved silently towards them through the trees. Presently we came to a low thorn fence, broken only by a stile, on the far side of which lay a clearing perhaps fifty yards wide. Beyond, the woods sloped steeply down to the enemy positions. I decided that we should cross the clearing and lie up in the fringes of the wood beyond, to wait until Maclean should begin the attack. I led the way, therefore, over the stile, and had gone perhaps ten yards when a machine-gun opened up savagely from a clump of trees some forty yards away. I looked round to see how many of the Tajiks were already across the fence, and, as I turned my head, somehow lost my balance and fell to the ground. I thought at first that I had only slipped, and it was some time before I realised that a bullet had caught me under the chin. The wound indeed was little worse than a deep shaving cut, and caused me neither pain nor serious loss of blood. The Tajiks, however, ran back, seeing me fall; and I lay in the clearing alone. The machine-gun

725 was silent, the gunner taking me perhaps for dead. I waited for a moment, then sprang up and ran for the fence. The German opened up at once, and his bullets hissed round me like furious insects as I vaulted the stile and made for the shelter of the trees. The Tajiks rallied when they saw me safe, and, gathering round me, opened a blind and ragged fire in the direction of the machine-gun.

I checked them as soon as I had recovered my breath and my wits, and, more by instinct than by reasoning, worked my way round the flank of the machine-gun post. When I judged we were well past it I lay down, and, while the Tajiks got into position, tried to decide what to do next. It is sometimes a weakness to see things from the other man's point of view, but, as I imagined myself among the German defenders, I knew that they were beaten. After months of inactivity they had been startled from rest, perhaps from sleep, by our approach. Their machine-gunners had seen a few Turkoman deserters, but, in the darkness of the wood, they could not tell how many were their assailants, or where the attack would come from next. Their nerves must be strained by the uncertainty; and, while they would soon recover confidence, they might collapse altogether if I acted at once. The alarm had been given, and I therefore decided not to wait for Maclean's signal but to go in to the attack.

For a few seconds I vainly racked my brain for orders which the men would understand. Then on a sudden inspiration I stood up, and, hoisting my astrakhan cap on the muzzle of my submachine-gun, ran forward shouting "Hurrah". The Tajiks did not misunderstand, and, spreading out on either side, charged through the trees, shoulders hunched and eyes glinting. The machine-gunners fled; we dropped over the crest of the ridge, and saw the huts and dug-outs of the enemy less than fifty feet below. I shouted "Hurrah" again, and the Tajiks bounded down the hill like wolves, letting out blood-curdling yells and pouring a withering fire into the camp. As we carried the first buildings I saw a German standing twenty yards from me, stripped to the waist, with a *Schmeizer* pistol in his hand. For a moment we looked at each other without

725

moving, then he crumpled to the ground, pressing his hands to his naked stomach. I had not heard the shot, but looked round to see Achmet grinning from ear to ear. We pressed forward, and, as I passed the dying German, I noticed that he was still a boy, with straight, fair hair and blue, staring eyes. His hands were clasped over his wound as if in prayer, and the blood was oozing quietly away through his fingers. Looking back a moment later I saw a Turkoman stripping him of his Wellington boots.

The enemy now returned a ragged fire, but we had taken them by surprise and they could not see us clearly for the trees. Several of them were shot down; and, as we came to close quarters, the rest broke and fled towards the road. There they ran into Smiley's machine-guns and were driven back, leaving one of their number dead. We were already masters of their camp; and they, too weak to counter-attack, fell back towards the south, sniping us from the cover of the wood.

Maclean and the Albanians had arrived on the scene just as we had gone in to the assault and had at once advanced to the attack. The first dead German, indeed, had fallen to Petrit Kupi's rifle; but, for some mysterious reason, the main body of the Albanians had failed to follow; and when we took the camp only Maclean, Petrit, and three of their bodyguards were there to join us. The rest of the Zogist forces now surrounded us, and, unaware that the Germans had fled, discharged volley after volley into the camp to our anger and alarm. Nothing could stop them; and the victorious Tajiks were forced to take cover from their Albanian allies in the German slit trenches and dug-outs. Unable to make ourselves heard, Maclean and I sat behind a clump of trees and despondently surveyed the battle-field. A few yards away a Tajik was dying in the arms of one of his comrades. Several dead Germans lay outside the tents and huts; and a group of Italian prisoners huddled behind a heap of rubble under Mishka I's watchful eye. Spent shots whined around us, and it was beginning to grow dark. I felt suddenly tired and intolerably thirsty.

More than half an hour must have passed before Petrit managed to persuade the Zogists to cease fire. Night had already fallen, and it was now too dark to plunder the camp systematically. We told the men, therefore, to carry off such supplies as were easily portable, and, retiring across the road, climbed towards the eastern range. There we found Smiley and Ndue Palli, who produced a most welcome flask of *raki*. We sat down to enjoy it, and were discussing the next move when suddenly a flare burst in the sky above us, casting a lurid, metallic light over the hillside. A moment later two mortar bombs fell quite close, followed by a burst of tracer bullets fired at long range. German reinforcements had arrived; and, withdrawing slowly beyond the range, we trekked back to Kurat.

We had at last drawn blood; and a Zogist officer with a Tajik lay among the dead to show the Germans who had been their enemies. At least ten Germans had been killed and twelve Italians from the labour corps captured. One Tajik and one Albanian had also been wounded. The honours of the day went to the Tajiks; and, now that we had seen them in action, we felt convinced of their military virtues and more confident of their loyalty. The Albanians had borne themselves less valiantly, but the fight had raised their spirits, and that evening both Petrit and Ndue Palli eagerly discussed plans for the next attack.

We went early to bed, but, while it was still night, I was startled from a fathomless sleep by the wail and burst of a mortar bomb. It was 3 A.M., and the room was already empty, save for Kolaver, who sat cross-legged in a corner watching over me.

"That was already the third bomb," he said with a smile. "It is good to sleep so soundly."

I dressed hurriedly, and, going out to where the Tajiks were encamped, found Maclean and Smiley walking up and down in the moonlight. They reckoned that the Germans were preparing a counter-attack, and were discussing whether to resist or to retire. Kurat stood on high ground and the Tajiks had already taken up defensive positions. The village elders, however, feared that a battle must invite reprisals from the Germans and begged us to go. Petrit tried to restore their courage, but, seeing that it was in vain, we struck camp, and towards 4 A.M. marched away towards Mazjhe to join Abas Kupi. Our discretion, however, did not save the village; and, looking back an hour later, we saw that three houses had been set on fire. Ndue Palli pointed towards them and said quietly:

"That is the price of the ten Germans we killed yesterday. Was it worth it? For us, perhaps; but not for the poor farmers who are paying it."

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We reached Mazjhe towards midday to find that Abas Kupi had left the village early that morning. The Partisans, we were told, had attacked Billal Kola in strength; and the Agha had marched off with all his forces to the defence of Kruya. All next day a battle raged on the face of Mount Kruya; and, looking out across the plain from the heights above Mazjhe, we watched the little white puffs of smoke which flowered where the shells were falling. The mountainside was too far away for us to follow the fortunes of the battle, but towards evening Petrit showed us a large building burning on the outskirts of Kruya. It was his father's house. More than five years had passed since the Agha had crossed its threshold, and now, on the eve of the liberation for which he had fought so long, he saw his home on fire — a sad prospect and a symbol of his declining power. Darkness brought no peace to the combatants; and for a long time we watched the blaze of burning houses, the flash of the guns, and the sprays of tracer bullets. At last the noise of battle died away, and late in the night a courier came from Preze with a report that Partisans and Zogists had joined hands and taken Kruya from the Germans.

The news caused a great stir in our camp, and we saw, from the unfeigned joy of the tribesmen, how popular such united action would have been. No doubt the rank and file of the Partisans would have felt much the same; but, though unity

* 129 might be the will of the people, the interests of the leaders worked irresistibly for civil war. That night hopes had been high, but in the morning they were shattered by a despatch from the Zogist headquarters. The Agha had indeed attacked and wiped out a German patrol, but this had been only an incident in the day's fighting. The real battle had been between Zogists and Partisans; and, while they had rent one another, the Germans had watched, and must have smiled, from the ramparts of the citadel. The struggle had been long and bitter, but in the end the Partisans had prevailed. Kruya was lost to the Zogists; and, under cover of night, the Agha had withdrawn his forces across the plain from the last of his strongholds.

665 186 While the battle still raged around Kruya we were joined in Mazjhe by Midhat Frasheri and Abas Ermenye, the military commander of the Balli Kombetar. Midhat came on a mule; Abas Ermenye rode a coal-black charger, and, in his blue-green uniform and flat, old-fashioned *képi*, looked like a hero from the Carlist wars. Nor was his romantic appearance belied by his conversation, for he quoted freely from the poems of André Chenier and the speeches of the French revolutionary heroes. He was tall and dark, with sensitive features, but there was something pedantic about his manner; and he seemed always to be worrying about himself. He was a young professor, fired with nationalist sentiment, and fascinated by the glamour of arms. Already, when a colleague of Enver Hoja's at the *Lycée* at Korcha, Abas Ermenye had sought to organise his students to resist the Italian invasion. He had fled to Greece rather than endure foreign rule, and there, in 1940, had vainly sought to raise a force of Albanian *émigrés* to fight alongside the Greek armies. With the fall of Athens he had been captured by the Italians, and had been sent to the concentration camp at Ventotteno, where he had remained nearly two years. In 1942, however, he had been allowed to return to Albania, and, a few months later, had taken to the mountains to organise the Ballist forces in the region of Korcha. Maclean had worked with him against the Italians in 1943,

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186

and thought him the ablest of the Ballist military leaders; and indeed of those warriors who, like Skender Mucho, Safet Butka, and Husni Lepenitsa, had once been household names among the Tosks, he was now the sole survivor. At heart a reformer, Abas Ermenye sought in the field an escape from the imbroglio of Ballist politics. He knew only that he fought against Communism, and, perhaps just because he doubted whether the Balli Kombetar any longer offered a real alternative, he spared neither himself nor his men.

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Midhat and Abas Ermenye had come as political and military delegates of the Balli Kombetar to inform us officially that their whole Central Committee was now in the mountains, and that they had decided to begin operations next day. Abas Ermenye planned to open the campaign with an ambush on the Tirana-Scutari road, and asked that we should send a British officer to watch the conduct of his men and to certify the results of the action. We agreed at once to this request, and Merret was chosen as our liaison officer with the forces of the Balli Kombetar. On the following evening Abas Ermenye duly laid his ambush, and, with a force of two hundred men, surprised a German convoy of forty trucks. Merret afterwards reported that three trucks were burnt, eighteen looted and damaged, eight motor cycles destroyed, and more than thirty Germans killed.

As further evidence of their good-will the Ballist leaders also sent us one Staff-Sergeant Schumacher of the U.S. Air Force, whose 'plane had been shot down to the south of Durazzo in the previous November. After wandering for two days among the coastal lagoons, Schumacher had been rescued by the Ballists, and for nearly a year had been cared for and hidden from the Germans on a farm belonging to Nureddin Vlora. We already had with us another U.S. airman, Sergeant Corsentino, rescued by the Zogists, and the two were to prove a most valuable addition to our Mission, helping in ambushes, road watching, and the drudgery of cipher traffic.

On the 10th September, after an abortive attempt against a bridge, we moved to Preza, where the Zogists and Ballists

*UA had already set up their joint headquarters. Preza was a rich and scattered village, boasting two whitewashed mosques with stocky minarets and several solid houses attractively painted in pink, green, or brown. It was perched right on the edge of the escarpment, fifteen hundred feet sheer above the plain, and looked south-east towards Tirana, less than ten miles away. The accustomed calm of village life was broken by the presence of some three thousand guerillas, and the best houses had been commandeered by the chiefs and their bodyguards. The villagers, however, did not grumble; and the Agha preserved their natural Zogist sympathies by paying for the wants of his armies in hard cash. A wooden house, painted dark green, had been reserved for our Mission. Looking down from its windows on to the road below, we were encouraged by the sight of the charred and twisted skeletons of the German trucks which the Ballists had destroyed the night before.

Towards sunset Abas Kupi joined us in the garden of our house and spent the evening with us. He told us at once how precarious was his position now that he had lost Kruya, but showed no signs of despair and eagerly discussed his requirements of arms and ammunition and our plans for cutting the road. The Zogist forces were still resting from their defeat, but that night, after we had eaten, Jenkins went off with a few volunteers and sowed mines on the road, destroying three German trucks. On the next evening, Smiley, with a mixed force of Zogists and Turkomans, blew up a small but vital bridge on the road, turning back to Tirana a strong enemy convoy escorted by armoured cars.

The Germans knew that we were in Preza, but had so far hesitated to move against us. The village was impregnable from the road, and an attack from the rear would involve at least two battalions. Their communications with Scutari, however, had now been cut for three successive nights; and they could no longer afford to ignore an enemy whose operations already embarrassed their retreat. General Fistun accordingly gave orders for our expulsion from the escarpment; and, on the morning of 12th September, our spies reported that the Germans were preparing a punitive expedition.

To resist the Germans was out of the question, and Abas Kupi therefore summoned a council of war to decide where we should retire. Mati, Shupal, and Kruya were lost; Shiyak was still loyal to the Zogist cause, but it was already enveloped by the Partisans and cut off from the Nationalist regions of the North. The Agha therefore proposed to divide his forces and to leave the main body with Hamsa Drini to watch Durazzo and preserve the allegiance of the coastal range. For himself, and those who cared to follow him, he embraced the generous resolve of marching north to Kurbenesh. There General Prenk Previsi's influence would assure him the support of the local population, and would enable him to keep up his attacks on the Tirana-Scutari road.

To abandon his regions was indeed a counsel of despair; and only three hundred Zogists and a hundred and fifty Ballists agreed to follow. Kurbenesh, however, marched with Mirdita, and the Agha hoped that, with British support, he might still rally the northern chiefs around him and make the region the new centre of Nationalist resistance. He gave orders, therefore, to evacuate Preza that afternoon, and decided to carry out three separate ambushes to confuse the Germans as to his whereabouts. One he would undertake himself on the march to Kurbenesh; the second he would leave to Musa Pitsari at Vorre; the third to Hamsa Drini in Shiyak. As a mission we too divided our forces to cover each of these actions. Maclean and I set out with Abas Kupi, Smiley joined Musa Pitsari, and Merret remained with Hamsa Drini.

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WE marched northwards through the afternoon; a rabble army of Zogist tribesmen, Ballist irregulars, and Turkoman deserters. The Agha led the van at a good round pace, with Maclean and myself close behind him, while Abas Ermenye on his black charger caracoled up and down the column in a cloud of dust. Night overtook us near the village of Bushnesh; and, when it was quite dark, the Agha called a halt in a field

*669

close to the road. There the leaders gathered round him to plan the ambush, while, contrary to the best military practice, the men puffed away contentedly at their cigarettes — five hundred glowing points of fire less than five hundred yards from the road. No reconnaissance had been made, and no one seemed to know the region, but, though the discussion began in low tones, the leaders soon warmed to their several themes. Each urged his plan in ever louder tones, and the council of war presently assumed the aspect of a public meeting, with the rank and file murmuring approval or dissent. At length, after half an hour of fruitless debate, it was decided to adjourn the meeting and postpone a decision until we had reached the road and could see how the land lay. Abas Kupi, therefore, set off towards the road, with Maclean and myself following. The path ran through a narrow stretch of woodland, and we somehow became separated from the main body, remaining with only ten men. Suddenly we heard the noise of vehicles just ahead; Maclean cursed our unpreparedness; but the Agha's blood was up. Regardless of the fact that we were almost alone, he ran nimbly forward as if intending to engage the convoy single-handed. I feared a tragedy, and was greatly relieved to see the last truck thunder past just as we broke out of the undergrowth.

A few minutes later the main body caught up with us, and for nearly half an hour the men milled around on the road while the leaders discussed where best to lay the ambush. At last a decision was reached, and the guerillas took up positions along a steep-banked S-bend in the road, with orders to attack the first strong convoy that should pass.

Half an hour must have gone by when we became aware of lights moving towards us from the direction of Tirana. There was a succession of metallic clicks as each man slipped a cartridge into the breach of his rifle; but we soon saw that only two vehicles were approaching, and Abas Kupi decided that so small a target was unworthy of our arms. The order not to attack was therefore passed down the line; and a few minutes later the Germans drove past, oblivious of the danger they so nearly shaved. I now lay down with my back to a tree,

669*

prepared for an indefinite wait, but it was not long before reflections on the northern horizon announced that something was moving along the road from Scutari. We strained into the darkness and suddenly caught a glimpse of the white glare of headlights, still several miles away. They disappeared almost at once, but presently came into sight again on a straight stretch of the road. We counted and recounted the lights anxiously. It was a convoy of nine trucks. This time the Agha gave the order to attack, and the men crawled into position, grinning nervously at one another. For a long time we saw only the headlights, but presently we began to distinguish the throb of the engines and the rumble of the wheels which grew to a roar as the convoy turned into the S-bend. The guerillas held their fire until all the vehicles were within our lines. Then, at a given signal, they discharged all their weapons into the leading truck. It swerved, skidded, and, as the bullets crunched up the windscreen, jolted to rest, blocking the road. With a screech of brakes each driver pulled up in turn, his truck floodlit in the headlights of the one behind. For a split second there was silence; and then all hell was let loose as machine-guns, rifles, and hand-grenades tore the life out of the convoy. Blinded by their own headlights and puzzled by the surrounding darkness, the Germans were doomed from the start. A few tried vainly to return our fire, but in less than a quarter of an hour the convoy was silent. For some minutes longer the guerillas worried only the dead; then the sound of shooting died away; and one by one they stepped on to the road. At first they moved cautiously, as if fearing a trap, but soon closed round the trucks, seeing that the massacre was complete.

There were only two survivors: one was a trooper whom we took prisoner; the other a young Austrian lieutenant. He was too badly wounded to move, and we left him by the roadside to tell the tale if he should live till morning. Meanwhile the guerillas fell upon the trucks to loot their contents and to rob the corpses. In twenty minutes the whole convoy was picked clean, and, to complete the work of destruction, each truck was set on fire.

000 " It's just bloody murder," said Jenkins, as we turned into the hills.

By a rare piece of good fortune one of our victims had been a courier, and we captured intact the " bag " from Divisional Headquarters in Scutari to the Corps Commander in Tirana. This disclosed the identity of certain Albanians spying for the Germans on Gani Kryeziu and Muharrem Bairaktar. It also gave us details of troop dispositions which enabled us to confirm the reliability of our German agent in the Corps Headquarters. The documents, however, which interested us most were two appreciations of the guerilla problem. These dispelled our last suspicions that Abas Kupi had ever reached an accommodation with the Germans, and presented him, along with Gani Kryeziu and Muharrem Bairaktar, as one of their most inveterate enemies. The general trend of the appreciations showed that the Germans were beginning to lose their nerve; and we derived considerable amusement from the Machiavellian designs and almost Satanic influence which their author attributed to our Mission. At least we had been a bogy to the German staff officers!

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From the ambush at Mamuras we climbed into the mountains, and, late in the night, were sustained by the bounty of a village *hoja*, who distributed bread and cheese to the men, with bunches of grapes for the chiefs. When all had eaten we pressed on, and, just before dawn, halted on the hillside to snatch some sleep. With the day we resumed the march, and, crossing a projecting spur of the Skanderbeg range, entered the broken and wooded region of Kurbenesh. We were in Catholic country now, and might look forward to an occasional meal of pig. The villages, however, were very poor, and, by contrast with Kruya, received us sullenly.

Towards midday we halted at Zeye, and there were hospitably entertained by the priest, a gentle young Franciscan from Scutari. His house was rude and poor, like those of the

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TURKOMANS BAKING BREAD

A TURKOMAN MACHINE-GUN POST, PROTECTING OUR CAMP ABOVE THE CONFLUENCE OF THE MATI AND FANI RIVERS

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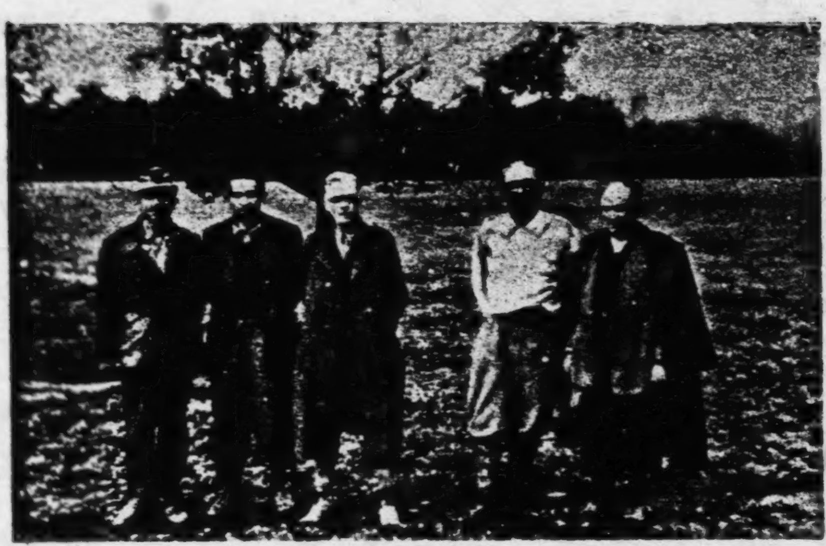

LEADERS OF THE BALLI KOMBETAR

(*Left to Right*) Ekrem Peshkopi, Vassil Andoni, Midhat Frasheri, Ali Klissura, Kocho Muko

SMILEY, BESIDE THE MATI IN FLOOD

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000 villagers; but he had made himself a desk and chairs, and there was a small library in his living-room. He had come to this parish five years earlier, filled, like so many of his colleagues, with the fervent intent to lead the tribesmen away from the evils of blood feuds and drunkenness. Experience had broadened his understanding but reduced his ardour; and he confessed with a sigh that all his endeavours had not yet reconciled a single vendetta.

In Zeye we found old Sul Kurti, Dule Allemani, and several of the Mati chiefs, with reinforcements perhaps a hundred strong. Among them there was also a handsome young man from Tirana, incongruously dressed in a grey Tyrolese costume, complete with green facings and bone buttons. This was Gaitcho Goga, a Vlach from Korcha, who was a member of the Zogist Central Committee and had been one of the editors of their newspaper, *Adtheu*. A professor of gymnastics, Gaitcho had represented Albania at the Olympic games, and, having won King Zog's favour by his prowess, had retained it by his pleasing personality. He was devoted to Abas Kupi, and henceforth went with him everywhere, serving by turns as secretary, interpreter, or delegate of the Zogist party.

We rested through the day in Zeye, and, towards evening, resumed the march northwards. Our path traversed the wooded mountainside two thousand feet above the plain, and on the road below us we observed a column of more than a hundred horse-drawn waggons moving slowly from the south. The German retreat had begun in earnest, and for a moment we were tempted to pursue this convoy. Night, however, was falling, and we knew that before we had caught up with the enemy the last waggon would be safe within the walls of Milot. We pressed on, therefore, and two hours after dark reached the village of Lester, which we had chosen as the base for our next attack. It was cold and wet when we arrived; and that night, for the first time since the spring, a fire burned on the hearth. Autumn was drawing on.

*669 At Mamuras the Albanians had indulged in argument on the battle-field with impunity: at Lester a similar indulgence nearly proved their undoing. We set out towards evening with

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a mixed force of some two hundred Ballists and Zogists and some fifty Turkomans to lay an ambush at a point where the road curved sharply to avoid a wooded spur of the mountain. Maclean took up position on the spur itself with the main body of Albanians, while I advanced down it towards the road with the Turkomans and some thirty Zogists under Petrit. We were moving in single file along a narrow track when suddenly I saw a light fifty yards ahead and heard voices talking in German. They were just to the south of the bend; and we therefore left the path and moved towards them through the trees to see if they presented a target worth attacking. It was a dark night, and, slightly misjudging our direction, we came out on to the road just round the bend from where I had observed the light. We sent two Albanians to creep up to the corner and see what was afoot, and meanwhile imprudently remained on the road. A few moments later our two scouts ran back and reported that there were two armoured cars and a group of soldiers within seventy yards. I at once suggested that we should withdraw on to the spur and join up with Maclean so as to attack them. Some difference of opinion, however, arose among the Albanians and, standing full in the road, they argued with one another in ever louder tones. Suddenly I saw a dark shape nose round the corner; I leapt into the undergrowth; and in that second the armoured car opened fire. It pulled up where we had stood and raked the hillside with its gun while I lay in a hollow with the Turkomans and returned a ragged fire. The Albanians had scattered in all directions, but presently Petrit rallied them, and we fell back together under cover of the trees to rejoin the main body. Meanwhile from round the bend the Germans loosed off their mortars blindly into the night. They must have had warning of our intentions and had prepared a counter-ambush. Luckily we had sprung their trap, but in the process our own plans were foiled, and at dawn we withdrew to Lester. By a miracle we suffered no casualties, though Maclean had a narrow escape on the return march. His bodyguard dropped a loaded sub-machine-gun; it went off; and a bullet ricocheting from a rock grazed his cheek just below the eye.

Smiley joined us at Lester on the 16th September, and told us of his experiences with Musa Pitsari. Three nights before, Musa had laid an ambush on the road only two kilometres outside Tirana, and had fallen on a German convoy of some twenty trucks. Two had already been destroyed, and the Zogists were disputing the control of the road with an armoured car when they were suddenly attacked in the rear by the Partisans. Unable to sustain a double engagement, Musa had broken off the action against the convoy and had afterwards frankly admitted that, while the Partisans were in the region, he would have to abandon the war against the Germans. 669*

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Smiley had therefore left him and had set out to join us across the plain which was now variously occupied by Germans and Partisans. His journey had been uncomfortable from the start, for a bodyguard had made off with his mule and all his kit, leaving him only the shirt and trousers in which he stood. In summer such a loss might only have been irritating, but the weather was turning cold, and he had been forced to sleep out for three successive nights. The villagers, indeed, had everywhere refused him hospitality and even guides, explaining that the Partisans had let it be known that they meant to shoot the "rebel English" with Abas Kupi and any Albanians who should shelter them.

That same evening we received warning that Partisan patrols had halted only an hour away. Judging of their intentions from Smiley's experience, we prudently abandoned Lester and marched for two hours through rain and sleet until we came to Selite. The villagers there received us well, but, as we learnt in the morning, their hospitality was indiscriminate; and, while they entertained our forces, they also sheltered a German patrol.

Next day I clumsily sprained an ankle on the march; an awkward injury for a guerilla, and one which, though gradually relieved by Gaitcho Goga's skilful massage, kept me tied to my mule for several days. Towards noon we halted in Malibardhe, a poor and straggling village set on a bluff above a sea of undulating, wooded hills. There we were received by the headman of the village, a fierce old mountaineer whose only

000 son had been killed in the R.A.F. raid on Petch. The tradition of hospitality, however, proved stronger than a father's resentment; he feasted us on sucking pig and grapes, and placed his house at our disposal. There, in the evening, we were joined 643 by Abas Kupi, who came with Fikri Dine and the leaders of the Balli Kombetar.

Fikri was stocky and dark, with grey, rather lifeless eyes and a greedy mouth. He looked tough; his speech was blunt; his manner arrogant. He was not, however, without subtlety, and we found him possessed of a distinct sense of humour. The first encounter with British officers must have been embarrassing, for a former "collaborationist" premier, but, to our great relief, Fikri sought neither to explain nor to excuse his conduct. Instead he told us the history of his attempts to procure arms and money from the Germans, and, with disarming frankness and a touch of irony, described the causes of his failure. He had tried to exploit them for his own ends, and his only regret was that his intrigues had been foiled. There is an element of exploitation in all politics, and Fikri's rage at being made himself the dupe was so sincere that it could not but compel a certain professional sympathy. When he had done with the past he questioned me anxiously about British policy towards Albania, and his own verdict was not perhaps mistaken.

"I know," he said, "that you English have an interest in our country because we have a sea coast and you are a sea power. Many of us count on that, but I have learnt from bitter experience that in politics little interests are often sacrificed to greater ones."

701 With Fikri came General Prenk Previsi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Albanian army and the paramount influence in Kurbenesh. He was a dark, rather weak-faced man, and wore a blue-green field uniform with red facings and highly polished riding-boots. We thought him a light-opera general, but as yet he took little part in proceedings and remained in the background, surrounded by a group of down-at-heel staff officers.

665 In Malibardhe we also met for the first time Ali Bey Klissura, who stood second only to Midhat Frasheri in the Balli Kombetar. A powerful landowner from the south, Ali

had served in Fan Noli's government and had been condemned to death *in absentia* during Zog's regime for participating in a "Communist" conspiracy. He had spent fourteen years of his exile in France, and there had acquired a style of eloquence and point of view which savoured strongly of the Third Republic. In appearance indeed, with his florid complexion, untidy, greying hair and thick horn-rimmed spectacles, he might well have been a protagonist of the Radical Socialist Party. 665

Ali had returned to Albania when the Italians had driven out King Zog and had resumed his place among the Republican leaders. Later he had become one of the founders of the Balli Kombetar, and had fought with some success in the revolt against the Italians. As an ardent Liberal and Nationalist, however, he cordially detested Communism and was generally supposed to have played a leading part in organising the Ballist effort against the Partisans. Zog had condemned him to death as a Communist; Enver Hoja as a Fascist. The wheel of political fortune has strange turns, but in both cases Ali was absent at the trial.

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THE Zogist forces had been in action for a fortnight,[1] and Abas Kupi waited with growing concern for the aeroplanes which should bring supplies from Italy. His war-chest was empty, his men were down to their last cartridge, but we knew now that the help which we had promised would never come. Now, just as we had brought the Agha and his confederates back into the struggle, our Headquarters ordered Maclean to return to Bari "to report". Smiley, with Sergeants Jenkins and Jones, our team of saboteurs, were to accompany him. I was to take over command of the Mission, but with express instructions not to urge Abas Kupi to attack the Germans, nor to hold out to him any hope of support if he should. My role was textually defined as that of "a neutral observer", although how a British officer attached to forces actively fighting the Germans could be "neutral" presented a 669* 648

[1] [autumn, 1944-- Analyst]

problem which neither Maclean nor I could ever solve.

These orders sealed the fate of the Zogist movement; for, without supplies, the Agha could not wage war, and without British support he must go down before the Partisans. They also marked the failure of our Mission. With the knowledge and approval of our Headquarters we had promised arms to Abas Kupi if he should fight. He had fought, but now there were to be no arms. We were to go back on our word. The guilt of this betrayal was not ours, but it meant that we should be dishonoured in the eyes of the Albanians; and we felt as if we had been stabbed in the back.

Sober reflection, however, reminded us that a soldier has no right to complain because he feels himself dishonoured by a change of policy. Great issues cannot always be decided over night, and, by an inevitable process, the operations of a military staff are guided by old directives even while new ones are under discussion. So it had been with Albania. When Abas Kupi had ~~announced his~~ decision to fight, our staff officers had still been guided by the directive to send arms to all who attacked the Germans. Policy towards Albania had even then been under review; but an immediate decision had to be taken, and they had therefore given the Agha the assurances which he required. Thus encouraged he had taken the field; but before supplies could be sent there came a change in policy, and it was decided thenceforth to support the Partisans alone. Nor could the clock be put back just because the Agha had attacked the Germans; for, as our instructions showed, that was no longer the real issue in London, any more than in Albania. To explain, however, is not to excuse; and we knew that to support only the Partisans was to surrender Albania to the Russians. They were our allies; but this surrender was none the less a defeat for the British Empire, and the cause of it lay in some defect either of understanding on the part of our statesmen or of vital strength in the imperial body politic. Of this defect our dishonour was a symptom and it was natural that it should hurt us.

Our first reaction had been to contest these orders, but a brief exchange of telegrams with Headquarters convinced us

that their decision was irrevocable. From shame and policy, 667*
however, we still hesitated to tell the Albanians the truth. To 648
have done so indeed might altogether have destroyed Abas Kupi's authority; for, now that he had been driven from his strongholds, his influence rested solely on the presence of our Mission and the hopes of British support which it inspired. We feared, too, that the news of our betrayal might provoke fierce dissensions among the Nationalist leaders and so bring about the common ruin. Time would reveal the position soon enough; and when they pressed us for news of supplies we only answered that we were without instructions.

The Nationalists, indeed, were still full of hope; and, at a 669*
council of war in Malibardhe, Midhat Frasheri expounded an ambitious plan for the creation of an anti-German bloc of all the northern chiefs. The mainstay of such a bloc was to be Jon Marko Joni, who might raise three thousand rifles and could open the vast region of Mirdita to the Nationalists. Midhat's plan was accepted; and that same day Abas Kupi and his confederates marched off to win the Captain of the Mirdites to their cause. They were playing their last card.

Maclean and I stayed on in Malibardhe to wait till the Agha should return. Abas Ermenye meanwhile continued to harass the German retreat with a mixed force of Zogists and Ballists; and Smiley blew up another bridge. The weather remained fine, but the days were drawing in, and the nights were cold. The Turkomans grumbled, for they had only summer uniforms, and two men sold their rifles to buy warm clothes. The rank and file of the Albanians seemed to sense that the end was near, and they no longer even asked when the aeroplanes would come from Italy. Every night, however, they gathered round to hear the wireless, but their despondency only grew as every broadcast poured out propaganda for the Partisans and made no mention of their own struggle. Food supplies, too, began to fail; and every morning we woke to find that another contingent of tribesmen had deserted. The atmosphere was tense and without hope.

At nightfall on the 20th September Abas Kupi returned

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with the Zogist chiefs and officers, and the leaders of the Balli Kombetar. Neither Fikri Dine nor General Prenk Previsi were with him. The evening was still warm, and for some time we sat together in the courtyard of the house. Little was said, and before dinner the Agha retired, pleading fatigue from the march. The guerillas gathered round when they saw him going into the house, and he stopped and gave them a short speech. I could not understand what he said, but it made them laugh and seemed to raise their spirits.

In the morning we assembled in the small, bare guest-room which served as our headquarters. Two tattered rugs had been spread for us on the floor, and several bunches of black grapes were laid out on a faded red handkerchief. Through the narrow, barred window a pale ray of sunlight fell on a crude lithograph of the Virgin and Child. Maclean, Smiley, and I sat under the window, while the Nationalist leaders completed the circle. On our left was Abas Kupi, smiling wearily, with Gaitcho Goga beside him. Abas Ermenye plucked nervously at the rug; Midhat Frasheri sat erect and expressionless, like some eastern ascetic; Ali Klissura lounged against the wall and wiped his glasses on his sleeve.

Ali was their spokesman; and for sheer eloquence his speech surpassed any other which I heard during the Albanian revolt. He began by recalling that the Zogists and Ballists had been in action against the Germans for a fortnight, without even a sign of encouragement from the British. Neither the B.B.C. nor Radio Bari had mentioned their struggle; and they had waited in vain for the arms which we had promised them. They had perhaps enough ammunition for one more battle, but already their funds had sunk so low that they could not buy food or boots for their men. Their forces were still nearly a thousand strong, but the region of Kurbenesh was of no great extent and the Partisans pressed them from the south. With British backing they could win over Jon Marko Joni, and might yet do great things; but if it was any longer delayed they must confess their defeat.

There was nothing which we could say, and indeed I do not think that Ali expected an answer. The Ballist leaders now rose together and left us. We remained alone with Abas Kupi.

"Ali Bey speaks well," he said, "but it is too late for words."

Then in quiet, matter-of-fact tones, he told of their meeting with the Captain of Mirdita. Jon Marko Joni had at once asked him how many cartridges and how many pieces of gold he had received from the British. He had answered that as yet he had only promises; and the cynical old chieftain had replied:

"The Germans have been my friends. To betray friends is immoral and to betray them for nothing is foolish. Let us meet again when you have something more solid than British promises."

Mirdita was thus denied to us; Kurbenesh would soon become untenable. Our retreat to the north was closed. For a few minutes the Agha again talked of attacking Durazzo, then of a sudden he stopped, and asked quietly:

"Tell me, have you still any hope that arms will come for me?"

I exchanged a glance and a nod with Maclean; and we told Abas Kupi the truth. The Nationalist revolt was over.

VII

DEFEAT IN VICTORY

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> I believed I was on the right road. . . . But fate was merciless to me when it threw me into this maelstrom. I wanted much, I started much, but the gale of the world carried away me and my work.
>
> GENERAL DRAJA MIHAILOVITCH: *Final speech at his trial in Belgrade, 11th July, 1946*

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*669 186 NOW when Abas Kupi saw that all was lost, he wasted no time in vain regrets or feeble reproaches but manfully resolved to bring his affairs to an honourable conclusion. Pride and resentment might still incline him to join with Muharrem Bairaktar and the Captain of Mirdita to wage a forlorn guerilla against the Partisans, but he had been four years the ally of the British, and loyalty, as well as judgment, forbade him to prolong a struggle which we had condemned. He decided, therefore, as a patriot to spare his countrymen from further useless bloodshed, and, like a prudent man, prepared to make good his own escape. That same afternoon he marched out towards Preza to bid his confederate chiefs farewell and to disband the Zogist forces to their homes. Thereafter he would only maintain a bodyguard, and, having discharged his last duties towards his followers, would return and seek our help to leave Albania and join his king.

701 In the Agha's absence we were committed to the care of General Prenk Previsi, the former "collaborationist" Commander-in-Chief. We rode north-eastwards, therefore, from Malibardhe, and, after a two hours' journey through rolling, wooded country, came on his headquarters, a lonely, stone

house deep in the forest of Skurrai. Sentries were posted along 701 the paths leading to it, and, warned by them of our approach, the General came out to meet us surrounded by his staff. We exchanged formal salutes and, standing in the rain, endured a speech of welcome. The Albanian officers were then marshalled in a row for presentation, while the General explained with the ostentatious precision of an instructor on a tactical exercise the dispositions which he had taken for our defence. Such military proceedings astonished the guerillas, but, determined not to be outdone, we gratified the General's vanity and our own sense of humour by inviting him to inspect our Turkoman troops.

Prenk Previsi had until recently been our enemy, but, as is often the way of defeated generals in their dealings with the winning side, he now sought to establish a bond of professional sympathy between us as brother officers. As a first step to this end he proposed, in accordance with what he doubtless believed to be British military custom, that we divide our party into officers and men. It was hard to say, however, who were the officers among the guerillas; and we had grown accustomed, after the manner of the tribal chiefs, to a changing entourage of Zogist and Ballist delegates, favourites, interpreters, buffoons, and bodyguards, who followed us wherever we went. We declined, therefore, to attempt a distinction which must have been invidious, and, among proud men, might have been imprudent. For a moment we feared a social crisis, but on a sudden inspiration I suggested to the General that our motley retinue might be classified as our *État-major*. Maclean bit his lip not to laugh, but honour was satisfied by this ridiculous formula; for, despite his rank and military pretensions, Prenk Previsi was, as I had surmised, but a tribesman in uniform.

We now repaired together towards the house, a solid, two- 000 storied building set on the edge of a low cliff and fronted with a trellis-work portico overgrown with vines. A round arch surmounted by an engraved cross marked the doorway and, passing under it, we were conducted up a steep flight of steps to the guest-room. A log fire blazed on the hearth, but, 000 instead of the usual carpets and cushions, the floor on both sides of the room was piled three feet deep with banks of fresh bracken.

701 Our host and protector, General Prenk Previsi, had played an important part in the revolution of 1924, and, with Muharrem Bairaktar, Fikri Dine, and Jemal Herri, had formed the quadrumvirate by whose efforts Zog's regime had been established among the Ghegs. When he had served the royal purpose Zog had deprived him of his command and had promoted him to an appointment on the General Staff, where he had enjoyed honour without exercising influence. More pliable than his fellow quadrumvirs, Prenk Previsi had laid aside his political ambitions and had devoted an unusual talent for intrigue to his advancement in the military career. He had won the favour of General Pariani, the head of the Italian Military Mission, and had been chosen by him to accompany the Italian armies in the Abyssinian War as Albanian observer. On his return he had been appointed Albanian Military Attaché in Rome, and his subsequent submission to the Italian crown had been rewarded with the rank of General. The Italians had given him a command during the Greek campaign, but he had been suspected of correspondence with the enemy and had been transferred to Scutari as Albanian adviser to the Italian Commandant. He had employed the next two years in building up a faction among the Albanian officers, but had stood aside from the general revolt against the Italians, retiring with his chief supporters to his native district of Kurbenesh. There he had remained until, in November 1943, the Council of Regency set up under the Germans had summoned him to the Supreme Command.

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727 His career as Commander-in-Chief had been stormy; for, while it was German policy to divide and rule, Prenk Previsi was determined to keep all the Albanian armed forces under his own command. His struggle with the Germans was necessarily unequal, but he emerged triumphant from their first challenge to his authority. The Germans had decided to raise an Albanian S.S. Division for the German army, and had offered command of the first brigade to a certain Salami

Chelai. This Chelai was a Captain on the Reserve, and as such came under the jurisdiction of Prenk Previsi. Now the General was naturally opposed to the formation of an Albanian unit which would not be subject to his authority, and had therefore ordered Chelai to decline the appointment. On German advice, however, Chelai disregarded this order; and one morning the General observed him entering the German Corps Headquarters, dressed in Colonel's uniform. Injured in his dignity, he resolved " to make an example " and ordered Chelai's immediate " execution ". An hour later, as the wretched man emerged from his conference, the General's A.D.C.s and orderlies despatched him on the steps of the German Headquarters with two hand-grenades and a volley from their submachine-guns. The General himself enjoyed the proceedings from his office window; and a large crowd gathered to demonstrate their approval. The Germans were not unnaturally enraged by such high-handed defiance, and demanded Prenk Previsi's instant dismissal and punishment. The old Regent, Mehdi Bey, however, had learnt his politics under the Ottoman Empire, and, summoning the General in the presence of the German Commanding Officer, said to him:

" I must ask you to apologise to our German friend for the mess your men have made on his doorstep. Next time you have to shoot an officer, see that it is done in a barracks and not in the street."

The German took the hint; an S.S. division was later formed in the Kossovo, but the attempt was never repeated within the frontiers of the old kingdom.

Prenk Previsi survived the incident, but his relations with the Germans were permanently impaired. His requests for arms and ammunition for the Albanian army were thenceforth invariably rejected; and a letter which he had addressed to General Fistun on this subject was returned to him like a schoolboy's unsatisfactory exercise with " Nein " scrawled across the top of it in green ink. It was this slight which had finally decided him to turn against the Germans, and, now that he was with their enemies, he unburdened himself of all his pent-up resentment. The account of his " collaboration "

701 was scarcely creditable to himself, but it was eloquent of the almost pathological incapacity of the Germans to win the sympathies of those who might so easily have been their friends.

We came to know Prenk Previsi well in the next few weeks, and, though experience only confirmed our first estimate of his vain and vacillating temper, we found him a good fellow and at times an interesting companion. In his cups he liked nothing better than to be called " Pasha " by his officers, but his observations on affairs were often shrewd, and once he inadvertently revealed to us the secret of oriental government. Our food had been falling off in quality, and, in the hope of improvement, we tried in turn an Italian, a Russian, and a Turkoman cook. The General shared our meals, and we accordingly asked his opinion as to which of these cooks we should keep.

" Use all three," he answered, " but stir up jealousy between them and let each one fear that you think to dismiss him. Then we shall eat well."

We tested his advice and were obliged to confess that it was sound.

*669 We remained a week in Skurrai, watching the summer fade out of the year. The leaves were already turning in the forest; and almost every day there were showers of rain. The evenings set in colder; and the General now had a fire lit in front of the house so that we might enjoy the last hours of daylight in its warmth. We passed the time in anecdote and speculation, and I began to take lessons in Italian from Mario and Franco. Sometimes Mario would sing for us, or we would call on the Turkomans to dance. Ihsan Toptani joined us on the 25th September with the news that one of his servants had been arrested by the Partisans while bringing back to us the spare charging-engine for our wireless. The Partisans had kept the engine, and had beaten the boy so hard to learn of our whereabouts that a week later he was still unfit for work. Merret also arrived from the south with Sergeant Jones, and reported that the Germans were retiring northward unhindered, while Zogists and Partisans still wasted their strength in civil war.

Once Smiley raided down into the plain with a mixed force of Zogists and Ballists and blew up a bridge. This was our last attack; for, with the knowledge that our Mission had failed, the mainspring of our energies seemed broken, and we were glad to rest.

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MEANWHILE the tragedy of the Nationalist leaders moved swiftly to its appointed end. With the death of Mustafa Jinishi the Partisans had lost the last restraining influence in their leadership, and now they fell upon Muharrem Bairaktar. The Lord of Liuma had driven in the German outposts around Kukes and already threatened the town itself when he received news that the Partisans had entered his region. He hoped, and the Germans must have feared, that they marched to his support, and he at once accepted their invitation to a conference. He met their delegates in a lonely house on the southern marches of Liuma; but, while the Partisans had come in strength, Muharrem was accompanied by only five bodyguards. He told the meeting of his hopes of victory, and offered the Partisans a close alliance with a joint military command. Their delegates, however, demanded that he join the L.N.C. and threatened him with death when he declined. Seeing that he was outnumbered, the cunning chieftain made a show of yielding, and, feigning ignorance, asked the Partisans to explain the principles which they had bidden him embrace. This request sowed the seeds of discord among them, and the meeting degenerated into an ideological wrangle between the commissars. In the heat of debate they had almost forgotten Muharrem, when suddenly he drew his gun, and, calling to his guards, shot his way out of the room. Two of his men were killed in the attempt, but Muharrem made good his escape and rejoined his troops.

Unable to fight on two fronts, he raised the siege of Kukes, and, marching south, defeated the Partisans and drove them back into Dibra. They returned, however, with reinforcements, and, after a week of fighting, scattered the men of Liuma.

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Muharrem crossed the Drin by night and sought refuge with the Captain of Mirdita.

While the Lord of Liuma wrestled in the toils, Gani Kryeziu had descended from his fastnesses and prepared to storm Jakova. The city lies on the western fringe of the plain of Kossovo, and its approaches from the mountains have ever been guarded by the passes of Zogai and Prusit. Gani accordingly divided his army into two parts, and, while he drove the Germans from their positions at Zogai, Hassan Kryeziu carried the fortifications of Prusit. At dawn on the 12th September the two columns debouched into the plain, and the brothers, joining hands, slowly pressed the enemy back against Jakova. Simcox, who was wounded in the action, afterwards described Gani's advance as "very brave". By Albanian standards, indeed, it was a great battle, and Gani was able to return the fire of the German artillery with the guns which he had captured from them. By evening all the villages between the mountains and the city were in his hands, and at nightfall he gave orders for the final assault. His forward troops stormed the German barracks on the outskirts of Jakova and fired their petrol dumps; but the tribesmen had been fighting for two days and were too short of ammunition to press home their advantage. The Germans remained masters of the city; and with the dawn Gani was forced to withdraw before their counter-attack to defensive positions at Prusit.

Leaving Hassan to hold the pass, Gani and Said fell back into the mountains to rest their men and concert plans for a second attack. Meanwhile Simcox returned to his base at Dobreit to report by wireless to Headquarters and organise the reception of further supplies. With him went Gani's political adviser, Lazar Fundo, who also served as interpreter to the British Mission. Gani had already called on the Kosmet leaders to join him in the attack on Jakova, and Simcox was therefore not surprised when a strong force of Partisans halted in Dobreit. As on previous occasions, he gave them hospitality, and, thinking that they had come to fight the Germans, was pleased to see that the Kosmet group were reinforced by the 5th Brigade of the L.N.C.

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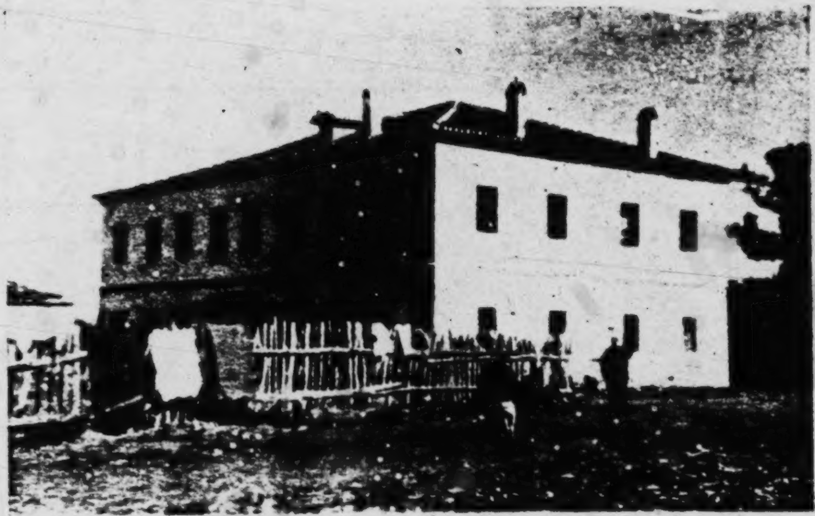
THE CHURCH AT VELYES, WHERE THE TURKOMANS BIVOUACKED

ABAS KUPI TAKING LEAVE OF THE PRIEST OF VELYES, BEFORE THE FINAL RETREAT TO THE SEA

[308a-]



OUR LAST HEADQUARTERS A PROSPEROUS HOUSE)

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THE BEACH WHERE WE EMBARKED
(MOUNT VELYES IN THE BACKGROUND)

*669 Next day, the 19th September, the "Kosmet" forces departed in the direction of Gani's headquarters, but the 5th Brigade remained in Dobreit and presently surrounded the British Mission's base. Their commissar then came and curtly informed Simcox that he must follow him to the L.N.C. headquarters at Berat. Simcox objected that as a British officer he could only take orders from Maclean, or from Bari; but the commissar explained that Enver Hoja was no longer prepared to countenance the activities of British missions not accredited to the L.N.C. To solve the deadlock Simcox offered to refer the matter to Bari by wireless, but the commissar put an armed guard round the transmitter and disclosed his real intentions by declining to allow its operation. Enraged at such treatment, Simcox refused to move; but the Partisans pulled down his tent while he still sat inside it and, after pillaging his camp, forcibly marched him off towards the south. On the journey he was kept a close prisoner and was submitted to every indignity. His kit was looted; his papers were searched; and the Partisans deprived a British officer of his arms. Thus he was brought to Berat, where he was handed over to the British Mission and evacuated by sea to Bari.

[665] At the first halt on this march, Lazar Fundo was called before the commissar, and, on identification, was stripped, laid out on the ground and beaten to death. Fundo had resigned from the Communist Party in 1938; and his murder was officially explained by Enver Hoja as "execution for treason to the movement".

While the 5th Brigade was thus engaged, the leaders of the Kosmet forces came into Gani's headquarters and summoned him to join the L.N.C. or bear the consequences of a refusal. Gani declined their summons and ignored their threats; and the array of his troops admonished the Partisans of the danger of seeking to force his hand. They resorted therefore to guile, and, pleading their incompetence to negotiate, invited Said to come with them to meet Dali Ndreou, the Commander of the 1st L.N.C. Division, who was, they said, in the neighbourhood. Said imprudently accepted, and was lured a day's journey to the south in search of the elusive commander. That night he

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was informed that it was Enver Hoja, and not Dali Ndreou, who wished to see him; and, when he sought to excuse himself and return to Jakova, he found that he was the prisoner of the Partisans. They used him more honourably than Simcox, but he followed the same road and was brought to the L.N.C. headquarters at Berat.

Many of the Communist leaders had been Said's friends in Paris; and in those days he had helped Enver Hoja and Ymer Dyshnitsa with money. They now spared no effort to win him to their cause, offering him high posts in their government and even promising the vice-presidency to Gani. Said, however, rejected all their offers, and, outraged by the murder of his friend, Lazar Fundo, and by the treatment of Simcox, who had been his guest, refused to accept his freedom at their hands. From Skurrai we urged our Headquarters to intervene on his behalf; and Smith reported that his life was in danger. For several days we feared that he would meet with an " accident ", but, after devious negotiations, he outwitted his enemies; and a fortnight later Smith saw him safely on to a 'plane bound for Bari.

The liquidation of Simcox's Mission deprived Gani of all contact with the British, and, with the capture of Said, he lost a precious hostage to the Partisans. Nevertheless he continued for some days to hold his forces together, hoping that our Headquarters might still keep their promise to " take a strong line " in his defence. This hope was disappointed; and, rather than call the tribes to civil war, Gani disbanded his men to their homes and sought the refuge of the mountains with his brother, Hassan.

The news of these events brought British prestige in Albania to its nadir, for it was plain to all that the Partisans had turned on Gani because he was the friend of England. They might pretend that they had attacked the Ballists for their " collaboration ", Abas Kupi for his obstructive passivity, or Muharrem Bairaktar in self-defence. By no stretch, however, even of their fertile imaginations, or of the credulity of the people, could they trump up a similar charge against Gani. Here was a man who had fought consistently against the Italians and the Germans;

who had befriended the Partisans themselves; and who, in all his actions, had sought and followed the advice of a British mission. Radio Bari had made much of his struggle; our Headquarters had sent him arms; and we had held him up to the other chiefs as a model of loyal co-operation with the Allies. Now all could see that we had failed to avert, and seemed powerless to avenge, the dispersal of his forces, the arrest of his brother, and the murder of his chief political adviser. Nor could the news that we had suffered a British officer to be paraded as a captive through the length of Albania do other than provoke the despair of the Nationalists and the contempt of the Partisans.

Thus, of the five chieftains who had swayed the Ghegs, Fikri Dine, Abas Kupi, Muharrem Bairaktar, and Gani Kryeziu were now gone down before the revolution. Only Jon Marko Joni still stood above the storm, and round him rallied the last ragged guard of Nationalist resistance. But the people knew now that the Partisans must win, and withdrew their support from a lost cause. From this time, therefore, the actions of the leaders began to lose all representative significance and became nothing but the manœuvres of generals without armies. Men did not turn against them, for they were popular and respected; but, though they might enjoy the general sympathy, their power was buried beneath the ruin of their hopes. They marched and counter-marched across the mountains; postured, orated, and intrigued; but escape was now their loftiest ambition and the instinct of self-preservation the driving force of their lives.

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WHILE we still sought to piece together such rumours as reached us of Gani and Muharrem's fate, our spies reported that Partisan patrols had been seen within two hours of our "hide-out". In our mood of despondency we shrank from the sheer physical effort of a march, and, now that all hope was gone, only pride induced us to play our part to the end.

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Maclean gave the order to strike camp; and, while the men formed up and the mules were laden, Smiley switched on the wireless to hear the news. It was the afternoon bulletin from Bari and opened with the announcement:

"British troops have landed in Albania. . . ."

The guerillas went wild with joy; and we had some difficulty in dissuading the General and his staff from revealing our position to the Partisans by discharging their revolvers in a *feu de joie*. The bulletin gave no details of the scene or the extent of the operation; and we had received no hint of a landing from our Headquarters. Our hopes soared, however, for, with a British army behind us, we might still save the situation. The Ghegs would now rise like one man to fall upon the Germans, and the presence of our troops must compel the Partisans at least to suspend the civil war.

We at once despatched a courier to bear the news to Abas Kupi. He heard it at Preza, where he had gathered some two thousand men: the remnant of the army which he had come to disband. His chiefs expected a speech of farewell; they were astonished by an eve-of-battle harangue; and the Agha wrote urging us to join him in an attack against Durazzo or Tirana. But meanwhile a telegram from Bari had revealed the truth and shattered our last hope. The landing had been but a commando raid at Saranda, near the Greek border. There had not been, and would not be, a British invasion of Albania. The twelfth hour was already passed.

We had abandoned Skurrai on the 27th September, and slept that night in the grim, stone fortress where Ihsan's father, Abdi Bey, had made his last stand in the revolt of 1906 against the Turks. It stood on the brow of a skull-shaped hill, and commanded the wide and stony valley where the swollen streams of Mati and Fani coiled together to their confluence. We were now on the extreme limits of Kurbenesh, and the range of mountains beyond the rivers was already in Mirdita. Skirting it ran a road, and straight opposite us was a concrete German block-house — the only building in sight.

000 It was not yet October, but that night there was a frost for

the first time. The morning broke cold and grey; a steady downpour of rain fell from an angry sky. The waters of Mati and Fani rose before our eyes; and the old mountaineer who was our host warned us that the rivers would soon become impassable. The night again brought rumours of a Partisan advance, and next day we decided to cross the valley, hoping that the flood which might still allow our passage would rise behind us to bar the way to our pursuers. We set out from the fortress at dusk and successfully negotiated the two rivers, which already ran breast-high at the fords. Lights were burning in the enemy block-house, but, though their sudden extinction made us fear that we had been observed, no attempt was made to dispute our crossing of the road. Beyond it we entered a narrow ravine, and, after an hour's march, were received into the poor but hospitable village of Rasfik.

Next day we continued the march northwards, and, on the last evening of September, halted in a small village set on the southern shoulder of Mount Velyes, the broad, grey pyramid of rock which rises five thousand feet above the ancient city of Llesh. Llesh itself was hidden from us by a fold in the ground, but from a neighbouring height we could see the ruins of the castle where Skanderbeg expired, brooding over the defection of his Western Allies and the triumph of the Orient. Beyond, the broad belt of the coastal plain dissolved through stagnant lagoons into the living sea. Velyes was in Mirdita, but, with much courtesy and a few pieces of our gold, the General won the alliance of the local *Bairaktars*. Jon Marko Joni's friendship was more uncertain, but, in the common distress, he too gave his consent to our sojourn in his territory.

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Our host in Velyes was the village priest, a kindly fellow who placed his rambling house at our disposal and tolerantly invited our Moslem Turkomans to sleep and shelter in his church. He too had once come out from Scutari burning with zeal to reform the manners of the mountaineers. But twenty years had passed since then; and now he contented himself with the little luxuries of tribal life, using his slender influence to help his friends, or foster the temporal interests of the Roman cause. Once I attended a service in his church: a low, stone

793 barn, decorated only by a crude, wooden cross, erected on a bare altar of rough stones. At the door one of the congregation stood guard over the rifles of his fellows, but each of us retained his pistol or his knife.

[771] For the Mirdites, Christianity is, above all, an expression of nationalism; and the elevation of the Host that day appeared to me less as an act of faith than as a gesture of defiance against the foreign invader marching under the banner yesterday of Islam, now of Communism.

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WHEN Maclean had seen that our Headquarters were inflexibly set on his recall, he had asked that a boat be sent to embark him from the coast between the estuaries of the Mati and the Drin. The staff officers in Bari, however, refused this request and ordered him instead to hand himself over to the Partisans for evacuation through Southern Albania. In explanation they alleged difficulties with the Navy; but, as we suspected at the time and later verified, their real and puerile design was to prove to Enver Hoja that Maclean and Smiley had really been withdrawn. We saw at once that in the eyes of the Albanians Maclean's departure to the camp of the L.N.C. must impose an intolerable humiliation on Abas Kupi. We also feared that Enver Hoja's attitude towards our Mission might make such a journey as dangerous as it would be dishonourable.

We therefore multiplied excuses for delay, making much of the difficulties of travel while the rivers were in spate, and discovering objections to each rendezvous which our Headquarters proposed. Such stratagems served for a time, but orders from Bari grew increasingly peremptory; and Maclean had just decided that he could procrastinate no longer when suddenly an urgent telegram from Headquarters countermanded all previous instructions. As we were later to learn, a commissar had spoken out of turn at the L.N.C. Divisional Headquarters, and the British liaison officers had thus discovered

669* 648 the real intentions of the Partisans. These were to march Maclean and Smiley south as prisoners to show the people Enver Hoja's power. Three days later our Headquarters signalled that the whole Mission would now be withdrawn by sea.

The prospect of Italy was welcome, but we knew that we could not leave Albania with honour if we abandoned Abas Kupi to his fate. We could not forget that he had stood by us in the dark days after the fall of France, and, though necessity might now compel us to desert his cause, we resolved at least to save his life. In his hour of need, however, our Headquarters forgot the past, and, to appease the unappeasable, prepared to sacrifice a proven friend. To their eternal dishonour, they informed us that they would not evacuate Abas Kupi, lest such a move should impair their relations with the Partisans.

000 In the kaleidoscope of politics all alliances and relationships are subject to the eternal laws of change. Interests converge only to separate again; ideologies and principles serve their turn in the unending struggle for power. It is therefore often necessary and — since, in the anarchy of international affairs, necessity is law — legitimate to abandon causes long supported and to dissolve the pledged bonds of alliance; for it is not open to a whole people to be faithful unto death. But it is always wrong to abandon to their fate men who have served us well. We may have to jettison their interest and abjure our support of their movements, but, if we cannot fulfil their hopes, we should leave no stone unturned to save at least their lives.

669* Ashamed of our Headquarters' cowardice, we now resolved not to await a Motor-Torpedo-Boat from Bari but to advise Abas Kupi to charter an Albanian craft in which we might cross to Italy together. We therefore sent Petrit to Preza to warn his father of our situation. Three days later the Agha joined us at Velyes with two hundred men, the last remnant of the Zogist forces. He had marched for twenty-seven hours, fighting two actions against the Germans on the way, and wading through the flooded courses of Mati and Fani. His

*669 guards were worn out and in rags; and the Agha himself looked grey and old.

Next morning, when he had rested, we laid our plan for evacuation before him. The knowledge that the British Command had declined to send a ship for him must have been a bitter blow; but he felt the depths of our unspoken shame and said with typical generosity:

"It is better this way, for it is my duty as your host to escort you to safety."

That same afternoon, therefore, he despatched agents to Durazzo and to Scutari to find a boat. At our request Ihsan also left for Scutari to make independent enquiries.

We remained a fortnight on Mount Velyes, waiting for news of the boat. Meanwhile the Agha selected the companions of his exile, deciding on Petrit, his eldest, and Rustum, his youngest son, with Gaitcho Goga to act as secretary and Ramiz as bodyguard. There might not be room for more in the boat; and he therefore entrusted his wife, his daughters, and the remaining son to the care of friends near Scutari.

000 The weather had broken now, and the first snow fell on the high mountains. The days passed slowly, for it was too cold and damp to sit outside and too dark to read indoors. Instead we slept and talked, or spent the time among the Turkomans. October is the season when the *raki* is brewed; and sometimes we would wander out to watch the villagers stewing the grapes or plums in their primitive stills. Smiley meantime undertook a last reconnaissance of the coast, adventuring as far north as Shengjin, the ancient Venetian anchorage of San Giovani di Medua.

One day the Germans, sensitive of our presence so near to the road, sent a patrol to dislodge us from Mount Velyes. Warned of their approach the Agha seized his rifle and set out to meet them. We hurried after him with the Albanians and Turkomans, and took up defensive positions on the crest of a ridge below the church. The ground in front of us was wooded, but, though we could already see the Germans working their way through the trees, the Agha told the men to hold their fire. When they were quite close he gave a shout and a single volley crashed through the branches. The Germans hesitated; then, as the guerillas began firing in their own time, turned and fled back towards Llesh. They did not come again.

On the 4th October a telegram from Headquarters announced that a boat would be sent on the following evening to evacuate Neel and his Mission. It was suggested that we might be embarked at the same time, but Smiley's absence on reconnaissance provided us with a convenient excuse for declining the rendezvous. Neel was duly evacuated with a number of Turkoman deserters, some Italian camp-followers, and two Albanians. By a tragic accident, however, his wireless operator, Corporal Button, was drowned in the capsize of one of the collapsible canoes in which the party were rowed out to the waiting Motor-Torpedo-Boat. Hibberdine, Neel's second-in-command, remained in Scutari, too ill to move, but with instructions to join our Mission as soon as he recovered.

Meanwhile the Partisans had resumed their northward advance; our position at Velyes would soon become untenable; and we therefore decided to await the Agha's boat in the coastal plain beyond Llesh. Before descending to the coast, however, we climbed with Abas Kupi to the rocky summit of Mount Velyes to look for a last time on the hills and valleys where we had worked and fought. A clear day favoured the expedition; and the labour of the ascent was rewarded by the magnificence of a view which embraced the whole North Albanian scene. Looking south I recognised the rocky peaks and the plateau of Biza, where, seven months before, we had swung down out of the night. From there I followed the path which had led us to the Zogist strongholds of Mati, Kruya, and Tirana, whose rich valleys and barren ranges were of variously pleasant but equally familiar memory. The city of Tirana was concealed by its guardian crescent of mountains, but across the plain, beyond the minarets of Preza, I could just discern the outlines of Durazzo, where Abas Kupi had first raised the standard of Albanian resistance. To the east lay the rolling forests of Mirdita — "the land of happy days" — which we had crossed as outlaws but had never known as

000 friends. Beyond them towered the jagged peaks of Liuma, over which we had toiled with Muharrem Bairaktar; and to the north the view was blocked by the dark massif of the Jakova Mountains, where the indomitable Kryezius had waged their lonely war. The course of the Drin was masked by the Liuman gorges, but beyond Kukes, where the Black and White streams mingle, I could see the noble river flowing northwards to sweep round the base of the Procletiya Alps and return south to join the sea five thousand feet below the summit where we stood. To the north, beyond the river, rose the red towers and minarets of fanatical Scutari; and between the grey waters of its lake and the glinting Adriatic the skyline was broken by the black mountain bastion of Montenegro. All around us lay the prize which we had lost; and, as we sat there gazing down upon it, I heard Abas Kupi say almost to himself:

" If only Mirdita had been with us. . . ."

Next evening, the 14th October, we abandoned Velyes and marched down rough and rocky paths towards the plain. By the ruins of Skanderbeg's castle we saluted General Prenk Previsi for the last time. He must have guessed that we planned to sail for Italy, but his sense of dignity forbade him to ask a favour which we might refuse, and he preferred instead to trust his safety to the loyalty of his tribesmen in Kurbenesh. Below the castle we came out on to the road within a few yards of the gendarmerie post which guarded the entrance to Llesh. A sentry stood outside, but he ran indoors as we approached; and the gendarmes literally turned a blind eye towards us, slamming the doors and shutters as we passed. Two hundred yards separated us from the turning into the plain, and we were still marching along the road when a German armoured car drove up behind us from the direction of Llesh. We must have presented an easy target, but the German crew, like the gendarmes, favoured the better part of valour, and, ducking down inside the turret, drove past at top speed.

We now turned off into the coastal fens, a tangle of swamp and forest with occasional water-logged pastures, intersected by canals and high thorn fences. By sunrise we had already marched fourteen hours, and soon afterwards halted in a wood 000 to lie up and rest through the day. Towards evening we resumed the march, and came by devious ways through the fens to the lonely farm-house which was to be our last headquarters. It was a strong, square building, painted white, and stood two hours' march from the sea in a broad meadow surrounded by the forest. Its owners were two brothers who had migrated there forty years earlier from the barren and bloodstained Montenegrin frontier. Both were of imposing stature and still wore the white jodhpurs and embroidered waistcoats of the highlanders of the North. They were men of substance, and, in our honour, drew on their oldest *raki* and killed the fattest lamb. The Agha, indeed, had long been their friend; and, by a strange coincidence, they had sheltered him from the Austrians during the first World War.

Our forces now consisted of a hundred or so of Abas Kupi's 669* stalwarts, nearly as many Turkomans, and some fifty Albanian, Italian, and other camp-followers of the Mission. Guarded by these faithful few, we were confined within an area of some five square miles, bounded to the north by the Drin, to the south by the Mati, to the east by the main road, and to the west by the Adriatic. Germans and Partisans surrounded us to landward; and, though the swamps and canals might afford us some hope of resistance, our only line of retreat lay westward across the sea. Our various enemies still hesitated to pursue us into the morasses, but we knew that this respite must be short-lived; for the Germans were nervous of our presence on their flank, and Enver Hoja was determined to prevent the Agha's escape.

The Agha's agents had not yet found a boat, but Ihsan now reported that he was in touch with a skipper who offered to attempt the journey for a hundred gold napoleons. Our own funds were exhausted, but Abas Kupi still had just enough money; and Ihsan accordingly returned to Scutari with Petrit to conclude the deal. Several days passed, and then Ihsan joined us again with the grim news that the venal skipper was holding out for a higher price. The Agha could not meet this

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new demand, but our host, learning of his difficulty, offered to pledge his land to raise the sums required. Ihsan now returned to Scutari, and next day informed us through Petrit that he had found a more honourable sailor, a Montenegrin, who was prepared to make the crossing in an open launch. That night Smiley commented in his diary: " All is arranged except where to pick us up; the date and the signals! "

Meanwhile the news had spread that we were in the plain, and scattered remnants of the Nationalists began to filter into our camp through the German and Partisan lines. The more sanguine among them believed that we had only left the mountains to prepare for a British landing, and even the leaders still hoped that we might protect them from the Partisans. Midhat Frasheri, Ali Klissura, and the chief men of the Balli Kombetar joined us on the 16th October, and, with dignity and discretion, sounded our willingness to embark them for Italy. An earlier breach of faith only increased our obligations towards them, but we could not demand for them what had already been refused to Abas Kupi. Our evasive answers must have sounded in their ears like a death sentence, but they heard us calmly; and that night Ali Klissura was the best of company. In the early hours, however, we were aroused by groans and blood-curdling screams from the corner of the room in which he slept. Someone struck a match, and we saw that the wretched man was in the grip of a nightmare. Midhat woke him gently; and Ali, still trembling, told us of a horrible dream in which he had been tortured with a knife by Enver Hoja.

We had already seen how the bonds of alliance are dissolved by the certainty of victory; we now observed that a similar phenomenon accompanies the acceptance of defeat. The common danger had united Republicans with Monarchists, but their feud was revived by the common catastrophe. Abas Kupi accused the Ballists of discrediting the Nationalist cause in the eyes of the British by their association with the Germans: Midhat Frasheri maintained that the Communists might still have been suppressed if the Zogists had joined forces with him at the beginning of the civil war. Such recriminations 669* might appear academic, but they disguised a natural and urgent conflict of interests. The two parties could no longer help each other in Albania; they might soon rend each other in exile; and, now that resistance had ceased, Zogists and Ballists appeared as rivals for British favour, rather than as allies against the Partisans. The Agha had resolved to dissociate himself from men who had "collaborated" with the Germans, but the Ballists still hoped to shelter behind his name. We never asked what passed between them that day; but, when their meeting was over, the Ballist leaders bade us farewell and returned towards the mountains looking like condemned men.

Midhat and Ali were followed by Fikri Dine, who came to [643] discuss the advantages of resistance or flight, and to enquire what reception he might expect from the British if he should land in Italy. Despite his defection to our side we could offer little encouragement to a former "Quisling"; and the Agha advised him to win back in the mountains the reputation he had lost in Tirana. He left us to return to Dibra, but our camp remained a rallying-point for Nationalists of every kind who clung instinctively to Abas Kupi. Among them came a delegation from the Catholic mountaineers of the Maltsia i Madhe, inviting him to organise their resistance against the Partisans. Abas Kupi received them in our presence and declined their proposal, saying:

"It would be against the wishes of the British, and, though they may forsake me, yet I will never turn against them."

5

THE weather had been fine when we came down into the [164] plain; but October is the malarial season, and our nights were plagued by innumerable mosquitoes. Our supplies of quinine were long since exhausted, but we were luckily spared the fever which ravaged the ranks of our Turkomans and Albanians. At first we spent the days out of doors, resting on the bright 000 coloured rugs which our host would spread for us in the sun-

000 shine. Then the rains came, turning the ground into marshland, while a cold north wind kept us to the house. The length of our visit strained the resources of the region; supplies of food declined; and, instead of the old *raki* with which we had been welcomed, we were now sold a more bitter brew. Sometimes, in search of news or a more varied diet, we visited neighbouring villages; and, when the evenings were fine, we would stroll through the camp to watch the Turkomans dance round the fires and listen to their wild, sad songs. It grew dark quite early now, and we took to playing chess, at which the Agha cheated as blatantly as Napoleon. Thus ten days passed; and still we waited for the boat.

727 + 669 Meanwhile,[1] the Germans had withdrawn from South Albania; they still held Tirana with a strong garrison; but the Corps Headquarters was already removed to Scutari. The Albanian Government disintegrated, some of the Ministers following the German generals, while others remained in the capital, or sought a precarious refuge in Durazzo. The Partisans surged forward in the wake of the German armies, and the Albanians submitted to a Communist government with very varying degrees of enthusiasm. A German defeat was good news under any circumstances; but the change of masters seemed a doubtful benefit to the Albanians; and we could but faintly rejoice at a victory which brought the Straits of Otranto under Russian influence. Our Headquarters, however, still seemed to believe that Enver Hoja was their friend, and summed up their policy towards the Partisans as follows:

> "Gradual build-up of L.N.C. and its army will now take place. Our relations with the L.N.C. will be strengthened for post-war purposes."

Our own experience allowed us no such illusions, and we could only smile when the Director of all the Balkan Operations telegraphed us his congratulations and said:

> "We are now reaping the benefit of eighteen months' hard work."

We had indeed worked hard, and there were some, though not enough, dead Germans to show for it: but the Russians had worked better, and theirs would be the reward.

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[1] [October, 1944 -- Analyst]

186
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Fear stalked through the camp in these last days, but Abas Kupi remained calm to the end. His kindness to us was unfailing; and never by word nor deed did he betray any sign of resentment against his treatment by the British Command. He understood that we were his friends, and always spoke of " our defeat " as if to show that he still identified us with his cause. We had come to know him well during these seven months in which we had so often broken bread together and slept under the same roof, and our respect for him had only grown with intimacy. No man can be great from morning until night, but there was in Abas Kupi a power of leadership, a natural wisdom, and a generous temper which endured the searching test of daily scrutiny. Courage, cunning, energy, and patience are necessary qualities in a guerilla leader, but Abas Kupi's peculiar genius lay in his skill in manipulating men, and in the natural pragmatism of his outlook. He seemed to know just how far each man could be used, and had reduced to a fine art the methods of making others serve his purposes. He would appeal with more than feminine intuition to whatever was strongest or weakest in each individual; and so personal was his technique in these matters that he would never speak with more than one man at a time. Trusting seldom, he could seldom be betrayed; but, if suspicion prevented him from delegating authority, his achievements were perhaps the more remarkable in that he was alone the indispensable heart and nerve-centre of an otherwise invertebrate movement.

He might understand by intuition; he judged only by results; and indeed it often seemed to us that he was deaf to argument and blind to a man's intentions. Such objectivity was proof alike against the sentimental appeal of a demagogue, the scrupulous hesitations of a moralist, or the fine-spun controversies of professional politicians. It was perhaps the real secret of his power, and may explain how an illiterate and primitive tribesman could command the support of intellectuals and could defeat, through four long years, the wiles of a Mustafa Kruya and the casuistry of the missionaries of the Comintern. The soundest calculation, however, proceeds in the last analysis from some act of faith; and trust in British

186
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159

power was the first article in the Agha's creed. His desperate situation might suggest that he had been mistaken, yet he still believed that his defeat was only a temporary reverse.

In the long hours of waiting we spoke together more freely than in the past, and our conversations ranged beyond the daily problems of war and politics. The Agha's philosophy was simple and earthbound, and he told me once: "We make our own heaven or hell here, in this world." He regarded power as the greatest driving force in men's lives; for experience had taught him that its possession was the necessary condition of personal freedom and of all good or evil action. In the bitterness of defeat he blamed the weakness of his allies more than the malice of his enemies, but showed the same objectivity in his opinion of people as in his judgment of affairs. A deep distrust of human nature led him to view opponents and supporters with the same detachment, and to judge them solely by their proven records, or their qualities of companionship. Enver Hoja he despised as "a fool", but he spoke with respect of Ymer Dyshnitsa and Seifullah Maleshova, and always referred to Mustafa Jinishi as "my friend". Likewise he spoke with sympathy of Mustafa Kruya, his would-be murderer, and we were once astonished to hear him call Mark Joni Markai "a good boy". As a leader he deplored the fatal suppleness of the Ballist chiefs, but as an ignorant man he bowed before their erudition. He smiled at Muharrem's vanity, and, if his affection for Gani might sometimes seem tinged with jealousy, he often told us of the "brotherly kindness" with which Gani had received him in Belgrade. Gratitude is rare in politics, but, if the Agha could not always reward kindness, at least he never forgot it. He loved the way of life of the tribal anarchy, and deplored the rise to power of new men who had never known, and would not respect, its personal freedom and ancient code of honour. Yet even his regrets were tempered by an instinctive sense of historical proportion; and once, in a more philosophical mood, he told us:

"You know we Ghegs have exploited Albania for generations. Perhaps it is only right that the Tosks should have their turn."

006

THE AUTHOR, DURING THE RETREAT TO MIRDITA

" SONS OF THE EAGLE "

From the summit of Mount Velyes Abas Kupi looks out over Albania for the last time

[-324a-]

18b

ABAS KUPI

(Photographed at our last Headquarters in the coastal plain, a few days before the end)

[-324b-]

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000 DESPITE Ihsan's message of encouragement there was still no sign of the boat, and it was in vain that our patrols lit fires each night by the sea. At length in despair we sent Ramiz to Scutari to discover the causes of the delay. For two days we had no word from him, but on the 23rd October he returned with news. The boat, a pilot launch, was lying up in the river Boyana and her skipper planned to slip down the estuary on the first dark night.

Meanwhile our Headquarters pressed us insistently to embark, and presently informed us that a boat would be sent for us on the 24th October. The wording of our orders allowed of various interpretations and thus afforded a pretext for a last delay. It was therefore decided that Smiley should keep the rendezvous with the rest of the Mission, but that Maclean and I should stay behind. Now that the fighting was over we were glad to be free of the responsibility for our N.C.O.s and for the American pilots; and we hoped, besides, that Smiley might persuade Headquarters to change their minds and arrange the Agha's evacuation.

Next night, while the camp slept, Smiley set out towards the beach, accompanied by Merret, Sergeants Jones and Jenkins, and the two Americans, Shumacher and Corsentino. With him also went Lieutenant Pittard of the South African Air Force, a young man with a shock of fair hair who had baled out over Tirana five days earlier and had been rescued by Zogist sympathisers. The party reached the shore towards midnight and were embarked without incident in one of two Motor-Torpedo-Boats.

The two M.T.B.s which evacuated Smiley and his party landed an L.R.D.G.[1] patrol, commanded by Captain Jackson, a young Rhodesian officer. Their task was to reconnoitre and harass the progress of the enemy's retreat; and next day, at our request, Abas Kupi provided them with food and guides.

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[1] L.R.D.G. (Long Range Desert Group): units employed for reconnaissance and action behind the enemy lines. Originally developed in the Western Desert.

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With the patrol there also came two Albanians, officers of the Balli Kombetar, who had been evacuated to Italy with Neel. No suspicion of personal "collaboration" attached to either, but, despite their violent protests, they had been sent back to face almost certain death, lest their presence in Italy should embarrass our relations with Enver Hoja. The stories which they told spread consternation through the camp; and that night Abas Kupi talked of suicide.

There was still no news of the boat, but in the morning the wireless announced that Mr. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, had landed in Italy. His intervention might offer a last hope, and we therefore sent him an urgent appeal to order Abas Kupi's evacuation.

Towards noon that same day Hibberdine was brought in from Scutari, supported by the Italian doctor, in whose care Neel had left him. That night there was a brush between Zogist sentries and a Partisan patrol. The net was closing round us.

Next day, the 26th October, a bodyguard roused us with the news that two Montenegrins were in the camp and had asked to speak with us. Both belonged to the Chetnik movement; and the spokesman of the two was a certain Major Vukadinovitch, a dark and determined-looking, regular officer who had been recommended to me by friends among the Yugoslav exiles. They had come under safe conduct from the Captain of Mirdita, and laid before us a proposal from General Mihailovitch, who offered to attack the German army in Montenegro with all his forces in return for British protection against Tito. We agreed to transmit the proposal to the Allied Command, but could hold out no hope of its acceptance. Nor, perhaps, did the two Serbs expect that we should; and indeed I felt that they had only undertaken their mission to satisfy themselves and their followers that they had done all that was humanly possible to save their cause.

We set food and drink before them, and, as we discussed their country's fate, I reflected that these were the men who had made the *coup d'état* against Prince Paul when "Yugoslavia had found her soul". They had been our allies then, when Tito and his Communists still denounced "an imperialist war"; and, when the Germans had occupied their country, they had been the first in all Europe to organise a movement of armed resistance. Civil war had diminished their ardour and worn away their strength until, in self-defence, they had sought accommodation with the common enemy. In the dark days we had admired them as heroes; now they were reviled as traitors; truly "treason is a matter of dates".

We were still revolving these problems when Davis came into the room with an urgent telegram. It announced that a boat would be sent for us that night, and ordered us to be at the rendezvous without fail. We now bade the two Serbs farewell and faced up to the issue we had so long sought to avoid. We had delayed our departure for nearly a month to give the Agha time to find a boat. There had been hopeful news from Scutari; but of the boat itself there was still no sign; and we began to despair that it would ever come. In Albania we were powerless to influence the situation: in Italy we might still persuade the Supreme Command that Abas Kupi must be saved. We decided, therefore, to go, resolved that, if the Agha did not follow on his own, we should somehow win authority to return and rescue him in a British ship. It was a hard decision; for we knew that, if we failed in our resolve, we must be for ever dishonoured by Abas Kupi's death.

When the Serbs had gone, the Agha came into the room, unconscious of our news, and challenged me to a game of chess. The three of us were alone, and it was between moves on the board that Maclean and I concerted our decision. Presently we were joined by Petrit and Gaïtcho Goga, who sat down at the table to watch the game. At last the Agha checkmated my king; and, as I put away the pieces, we told him that we must leave that night. He heard us calmly and approved our reasons. Then, tapping the chess-board, said to me:

"Inshallah! We shall play the next round in Italy!"

When our Headquarters had first ordered our withdrawal we had sought and had been granted permission to evacuate

000 our Turkoman and Italian troops. It had also been agreed that we should bring out the three faithful Albanian interpreters who, although humble men, might be fatally compromised before the Partisans by their association with us. These decisions were now reversed, on the grounds that the numbers of the Turkomans and Italians would dangerously prolong the time of embarkation, while the rescue of the interpreters might lead to complications with the L.N.C. We were ordered only to bring out British personnel, and, as a special concession, our four Russian camp-followers. It was hard enough to abandon troops who had served us loyally, but neither Turkomans nor Italians were apprised of our plans. We had told our interpreters, however, that if it ever came to an evacuation we should take them with us; now we had to perform the painful and invidious task of letting them know that they must stay behind. They understood and accepted our " advice " to remain, and with great dignity forbore to ask for any explanation. Meanwhile our intentions were kept a close secret from the rest of the camp, for we feared that the Turkomans might seek to prevent what they would certainly regard as our desertion.

We burnt our papers that afternoon and sought to put our affairs in order. It was several weeks since our Headquarters had been able to renew our funds; and our war-chest was now reduced to seven sovereigns. The bodyguard had not been paid for a month, and we owed considerable sums besides for the upkeep of our Mission and the feeding of our troops. To have left the farmers unpaid would have been to plumb new depths of dishonour; and we gladly accepted fifty gold pieces from the Agha to save our reputation.

Towards nightfall, while the Turkomans sang round their fires, we sat together with Abas Kupi for the last of many conferences. He seemed confident that his boat would come; and, with the help of Petrit and Gaitcho Goga, we helped him draft his farewell proclamation to the Albanian people. When all that there was to say had been said we drank the Albanian toast of " *Tungjatjeta* " and took our last meal together in silence. Outside the camp already slept, and, towards ten

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o'clock, we gave orders for the ponies to be saddled. The day had been grey and wet, but there had been a rainbow in the evening, and now the night was clear in the cold light of the moon. I embraced Abas Kupi, swung into the saddle, and without turning back rode away between the groups of sleeping men huddled round the dying camp fires.

Our way led from the forest through marshes and across a broad lagoon where the water was often up to my pony's girths. At first only the sound of splashing disturbed the night, but soon we began to distinguish the deeper murmur of the waves lapping the sandy shore. Beyond the lagoon we climbed on to a low ridge, and, threading our way through a German minefield, rode down on to the beach. The sea was calm as a lake, and a full moon hung just above the horizon. There was a German block-house a mile away to the north, but we judged, or hoped, that its garrison was too demoralised to disturb us.

When the moon was down we lit a fire of brushwood, and, wrapped in our overcoats, sat down to wait for the boat. Two hours must have passed, and I had given up straining into the darkness, when suddenly Maclean pointed to a dark shape out at sea. It seemed about a hundred yards away, and it surprised me that I should not have noticed it before. Presently a smaller shape was detached from it, and, as the waves washed it up on to the beach, I saw that it was a flat-bottomed landing-craft. It was paddled by two sailors with an officer who stepped out and saluted us. He belonged to " Security " and had been sent to see that we did not embark Abas Kupi.

I now bade farewell to Shaqir and Halit, and gave the faithful Kolaver my horse and saddle-bags with a handful of gold. That lean and hardened brigand kissed me on the face and hands and burst into tears like a child. I climbed into the landing-craft with Hibberdine and two of the Russians; and we pushed off to shouts of " *Tungjatjeta* " from the Albanians. In a few minutes we were alongside the motor-boat, a M.A.S., manned by an Italian crew. Ivan pulled me up over the side, and I sat down dejectedly on a coil of rope. The M.A.S. was

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comfortless and impersonal, like the aeroplane which had brought us seven months before. The sailors now rowed back towards the beach and presently returned with Maclean, Davis, and the remaining Russians. When all were safe on board the landing-craft was hoisted over the side; then, with her engines barely turning over, the M.A.S. slipped quietly out to sea. As we cleared Cape Rodonit the Captain ordered full speed ahead; and we shot forward in a cloud of spray. Looking back into the fading darkness I could just make out the low Albanian shore and the black mountains of Montenegro running down steeply to the sea.

7

At dawn the Balkan coast was lost to sight, and we cruised alone between sea and sky. The autumn night had been cold, but the wind and the spray dropped with the morning; and the M.A.S. made good headway through an oily swell. Maclean joined me on deck towards eight o'clock; and presently we saw the fortifications of Brindisi rising above the low Apulian shore. We ran our course between the minefields which guard the harbour approaches, and an hour later were cutting the calm waters in the lee of the granite mole. The roar of the engines sank to a hum, and the M.A.S. nosed gently up against the quayside at the foot of the old castle.

Ashore, a squad of sailors were changing guard, while a few naval and army officers stood talking outside the Harbour Control. Their spotless uniforms and military bearing made a striking contrast to our own wild and Balkanised appearance; and Maclean justly observed that we could scarcely be mistaken for officers or gentlemen. Maclean himself was dressed in sandals and torn jodhpurs, a faded green tunic, swathed in bandoliers, and a white, Kruya skull-cap on his head. My own headgear was a black, sheepskin *shubara*; my field-boots were cracked and coming apart at the heels; and my once smart cord uniform was soiled and stained from seven months continual wear. I had let my beard grow, too, since the flesh wound under my chin; and it was several months ooo since either of us had had a haircut.

The group of officers advanced to meet us as we came down the gangway and welcomed us as if we had been heroes. They could not tell how deep was our dishonour, but I was shamed by an admiration which they would have withheld from braver men. It was the tribute of the ignorant herd to the lone wolf, compelled not by the worth but by the glamour of our enterprise.

They escorted us to the Harbour Security Office, where we established our identity and telephoned to Headquarters to report our arrival. Then we said good-bye to our faithful Russians, who were to be sent to a Displaced Persons Camp. They begged us to take them to England, but, under the terms of an inter-Allied convention, they would have to be repatriated to Russia. I enquired what reception they might expect on their return, and the Security Officer replied:

"No one can say for certain, but I wouldn't give much for these fellows' chances. As far as we know, the Russians have been shooting any of their chaps who've been in close touch with foreigners—Enemy or Allied."

From the harbour we were driven into Brindisi to the flat where we had slept the night before our jump into Albania. It seemed as grim and comfortless as when we had last been there, and the same disgruntled orderly served us an army breakfast of fried spam and strong tea. We were back where we had started.

Smiley arrived from Bari towards midday, and we drove back together through the afternoon along the familiar coastal road. On the way we stopped at an army store where we were issued with a clean set of battledress. An hour later we reached Headquarters, where the staff officers we had so often, and doubtless so unjustly, cursed, received us with real, or feigned, enthusiasm. The evening was spent in reading two months' accumulation of mail; and that night we dined together in the Hôtel Impériale with a number of old friends, among them Neel, Simcox, and Peter Kemp.

Amid the hardships of an outlaw's life I had sometimes allowed my mind to dwell on those creature comforts which

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we might hope to find on our return to Bari. The Hôtel Impériale, however, was full to overflowing, and that night and the next we were lodged in a flat which our Headquarters had requisitioned. It was entirely unfurnished, save for a single wooden chair, and was equally devoid of hot water or electric light. We were, indeed, accustomed to sleeping on the floor, but in Albania our rest had usually been assured by a mattress or a heap of ferns. No such luxuries obtained in our flat, and the unyielding hardness of the parquet was only mitigated by an army blanket. Nevertheless I slept heavily, for it was forty-eight hours since I had been to bed.

I woke soon after eight next morning and put on my new battledress, which fitted well enough and only lacked badges of rank. Maclean was still asleep, but I felt hungry, and so made my way to the Hôtel Impériale in search of breakfast and of a barber who might shave off my beard. The dining-room was crowded with worthy officers munching their bacon and eggs, but a scruffy waiter barred the way in. He explained that no breakfasts could be served after nine o'clock and that I was already six minutes late. Baulked by this irksome regulation, I marched off to the hotel snack-bar, and, fighting my way through the crowd, secured a cup of coffee and a sardine sandwich. I had scarcely sat down to this unappetising repast when I was accosted by an unknown officer and curtly reminded that the wearing of beards was contrary to King's Regulations. At first I thought him drunk, despite the early hour, and offered him a chair, prepared to humour him. My courtesy, however, only aroused his wrath and he went red in the face, spluttering that he was the Provost Marshal. I rose to explain my situation, but, as I did so, his eagle eye observed that I wore no badges of rank. From red he turned purple, and hissed :

" What are you doing here anyway ? Don't you know that this hotel is out of bounds to Other Ranks ? "

My explanation drew from him a decent apology, but I was already beginning to regret the freer ways of the mountains.

The rhythm of our lives in Albania had been among the o/oo

healthiest of our circumstances; for, in the mountains, events could move no faster than a man might walk. Allies, neutrals, or enemies approached alike on foot; and, since no man can run for long uphill, flight or attack proceeded at the same easy pace as the most simple errand. The tempo of the march encouraged meditation; the leisure of the camp afforded ample opportunity for the most detailed discussion. The conduct of negotiations was likewise seldom hurried, for a march of hours, or even days, would often precede a meeting. The business might be trivial, but the needs of the flesh and the customs of hospitality obliged the traveller to spend the night, or at least to take a meal, with those he had come to see. Each word might thus be weighed at leisure; and, since the necessary interludes for food or rest automatically divided each meeting into two or more sessions, there was always time to review conclusions or prepare new arguments. Nor was this even tenor of our work distracted by a multiplicity of routines or interviews. Our way of life tended inevitably to eliminate all that was superfluous, and the dangers of travel spared us from importunate visitors. Above all, we were masters of our own time, for we lived in a world where it was not unusual to be as much as a day late for an appointment. Each of our problems was thus revolved in frequent meditation and prolonged debate; and we had the rare satisfaction of knowing that our decisions or reports were the soundest of which we were capable.

In Bari this wholesome rhythm of life was rudely shattered by the bustle of a mechanised world. Cars rushed us from one office to another; harassed officials plied us with superficial questions; and memoranda on the most intricate problems were required at half an hour's notice. Interviews were continually disturbed by the ring of the telephone; and conversations were brought to an end, not by the exhaustion of the subject, but by the approach of the next appointment. At first I was bewildered; then repelled; and within a week the three of us had agreed to return to the mountains as soon as we could.

Life in Bari might seem disagreeable, but more alarming

000 was the strange distortion of men's minds. Never before had there been so many British observers in the Balkans, and yet never can responsible Englishmen have cherished so many misconceptions and illusions about the problems of that blood-stained region. The military record of the Partisans had been brilliant; and it might well be that the needs of war justified, or made inevitable, exclusive British support of their cause. Such a policy, however, must involve the sacrifice of important British interests; and, though Englishmen might be obliged to contribute to its success, it seemed natural to expect that they should do so in a mood of sober reluctance. Instead, a genuine enthusiasm for Tito and his works pervaded the British Headquarters; and responsible staff officers revelled with indecent, almost masochistic, glee in the destruction of Chetniks and Zogists who were at least our friends. The Partisans, it seemed, could do no wrong; their claims and allegations were accepted at face value; and their opponents — Socialists and Agrarians included — were incongruously branded as " Fascists " or " reactionaries " by the most conservative of Englishmen.

For a long time I felt as if we had come to another world, where people used the same words as we did but with wholly different meanings. It was as if they had been colour-blind, or had sought to solve an algebraical problem without knowing what any of the symbols stood for. One night, soon after our return to Bari, I found myself at dinner next to the general officer then immediately responsible for the conduct of operations in the Balkans. In the course of conversation he asked my opinion of Tito, and I answered that as far as I knew he was a capable and loyal agent of the Comintern.

" But surely," he queried, " Stalin dissolved the Comintern two years ago."

" Nominally, perhaps," I ventured, " but all our experience in the Balkans seems to point the other way."

" Have another drink, my dear fellow," he replied. " Anyone would think you'd been listening to Goebbels."

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669*
648

Our discussions with the authorities in Bari lasted six days, and we already despaired that Abas Kupi would ever reach Italy in his own boat. The last hope of saving his life — if indeed he still lived — was to return ourselves and bring him out; but our Headquarters remained stubbornly opposed to a plan which might strain their relations with Enver Hoja. Our telegram to the Foreign Secretary, however, had not been without effect; and before leaving Italy Mr. Eden had recommended that Abas Kupi should be rescued. His opinion could scarcely be ignored, but our Headquarters nevertheless referred for instructions to the Supreme Command, alleging that, however desirable politically, the Agha's evacuation might have unfavourable military consequences. Maclean was accordingly summoned to Naples to put the case for Abas Kupi before the Supreme Allied Commander, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson.

Maclean flew from Bari on the 3rd November, and I joined him on the following evening in the spacious palace of Caserta, the seat of the Supreme Command. General Wilson had made us his guests; and, as such, we were accommodated in comfortable booths in the precincts of a building where King Bomba had kept his hounds. " The Kennels ", as this guest compound was irreverently known, had witnessed many Balkan dramas; and the previous occupants of our beds had been the rival Greek Generals, Zervas and Sarafis, who had just subscribed, and were soon to denounce, an insincere alliance.

That night we dined with Mr. Harold Macmillan, who was at this time Resident Minister-of-State in the Mediterranean area. His intervention might decide the outcome of our visit; and, when the meal was over, we sought to enlist his support for our plans. He heard us impassively, staring straight in front of him from the depths of his armchair, his attention apparently centred on his pipe. Then with the same disconcerting detachment he made himself devil's advocate and

*669 [648]

raised every possible objection to our arguments. Our answers, however, seemed to accord with his own inner thoughts; and at length he dismissed the subject, saying:

" Of course we must save Abas Kupi. Personally I'd be all for bringing Mihailovitch out as well."

This robust attitude was a welcome contrast to the appeasing climate of Bari, and it was with renewed confidence that we made our way next morning to the Supreme Commander's offices. An orderly directed us to the General's ante-room, where a young A.D.C. was busy on the telephone, arranging an air passage to Cairo for a lady friend's pekinese. He offered us a drink, and, while waiting, showed us the signed photographs of war-time celebrities with which the walls were covered. Presently a group of staff officers emerged from the adjoining room and announced that the General's morning meeting was over. It was now our turn.

The Supreme Allied Commander, or "Jumbo", as the British army knew him, stood in the middle of the room, his bulky person clad in corduroy trousers and a thick, khaki pullover. He welcomed us with fatherly kindness and led us to a corner of the room where half a dozen deep armchairs had been set in a semicircle after the manner of an Arab *majlis*. He sat us down on either side of him and asked us to point out on a map of Albania the dispositions of Germans, Zogists, and Partisans. He followed our explanations closely, peering over narrow, horn-rimmed spectacles, and then began to ply us with curiously disconnected questions, taking rough notes in pencil of points in our replies. Presently he put down his writing-pad and, after a moment's pause, announced:

"Yes, I agree with you, the fellow's been our friend and we must get him out. We'll do it quite openly; and we'll tell Hoja too; but," and here his beady eyes twinkled, " not until your man's safe in Italy."

He then heaved himself out of the armchair, and, walking over to his desk, called down the telephone for his Chief-of-Staff. A moment later we were joined by General Gammel, who was asked to prepare orders for Abas Kupi's rescue. Maclean was put in charge of the operation. We had won.

669*

It was too late to travel to Bari that day, and so we drove out together to spend the afternoon among the ruins of Pompeii. We had scarcely returned to Caserta from this expedition when the telephone rang. It was Smiley, who told us that Abas Kupi with five companions had landed at Brindisi that morning. Honour at least was saved; and yet I felt disappointed that we had not had time to return to Albania and rescue the Agha in a British ship.

It appeared that the night after our departure in the M.A.S., Ihsan and his Montenegrin skipper had put to sea from the Boyana estuary and successfully embarked the Agha and his companions. They had made good headway through the night, and had already come in sight of Brindisi next morning when the engine of the launch had broken down. They had striven to repair it; they had signalled for help; but all their efforts had been in vain and the waves had washed them back to sea. Seven nights and six days they had drifted southward, sustaining life with rain water and the meagre remnant of one night's provisions. They despaired of life, but on the seventh morning, as the current bore them into the Straits of Otranto, they were sighted by a minesweeper and were towed into Brindisi, exhausted but alive.

Their future was for some days the subject of anxious discussion; and Enver Hoja demanded that they be sent back to Albania for trial. The decisions of Caserta, however, had confirmed their status as our friends; and Abas and his sons were lodged with Said and Ihsan in a villa above the little town of Rutigliano.

186

Our work was done now, but before leaving Italy we paid a last visit to the Agha and his companions. The day was cold and wet, and the armed sentries patrolling the grounds made the house look like a prison. Indoors the rooms were dark and cheerless, furnished with a few wooden chairs and army beds. It was a drab end to all our dreams; but despite the ruin of his hopes and the personal tragedy of exile — and exile is hard for an old man who can neither read, nor write, nor speak a

186 foreign language — the Agha still displayed his old strength of heart and mind.

" I still put my trust in England," he told us. " The future is dark, but one day you will be strong again. As for me, I shall live for the time when we return together to the mountains to take up again the unending battle for freedom."

EPILOGUE

669*
622

Two days later we were back in London; our mission was ended; and we could only repeat what Bismarck had once observed to the German candidate for a Balkan throne: "It will always have been an experience." A month passed in holiday; and within six weeks I was flying out to China to try my luck again. Maclean and Smiley were soon to follow.

So ended our connection with the Albanian revolt; and I will now dismiss this melancholy tale with a brief account of the fate of its protagonists. The Agha, his two sons, Gaitcho Goga and Ramiz, have joined their king in Egypt. Said Kryeziu and Ihsan Toptani are in Rome. Of the Ballist leaders, Midhat Frasheri and Ali Klissura escaped from Scutari in a river barge and crossed the Adriatic with two hundred of their adherents. Nureddin Vlora and the Pasha, his brother, made good their escape through Vienna. Abas Ermenye, their gallant commander, hid for a time in the South, and later escaped to Greece. There he has since been joined by General Prenk Previsi and by Fikri Dine. The old Captain of Mirdita came by devious ways to Rome, and has found safety in the shadow of the Vatican. Of Mustafa Kruya there is no certain news, but rumour has it that his timely conversion to the Roman faith has been rewarded by the protection of a cloister.

Not all escaped. Gani Kryeziu returned to Jakova when the Germans had gone, and, believing that Said was still with Enver Hoja, requested a safe-conduct to Tirana from the Partisan authorities. He was at once arrested, and, since Jakova is within the frontiers of Yugoslavia, found himself Marshal Tito's prisoner. He was arraigned before a "people's court" and condemned to five years' hard labour on charges of "reactionary tendencies" and of "exposing the people to German reprisals". His brother, Hassan, was lured meanwhile into the Partisan headquarters at Jakova, on the pretence that Gani had sent for him. He was never seen alive again.

*669
622

The promise of a general amnesty enticed the Zogist chiefs into Tirana. All were arrested, and many have been shot, among them our friends: Sul Kurti, Murad Basha, Dule Allemani, and Yussuf Chelai. Nor has the persecution ceased with the murder of the chiefs; and the wretched Shaqir has been sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, simply because he served as our interpreter.

In Mirdita the Captain's two sons, Mark and Skender, long sustained the resistance of their clans. Mark was at last betrayed by his brother-in-law, who broke the sacred laws of hospitality and shot him while he slept. Skender now bears the tribal standard alone, and has avenged his brother's death by the extermination of the murderer, his own sister, and their children to the last babe.

The man-hunt still goes on, and its attendant skirmishes, denunciations, and intrigues fan the flames of popular discontent. For close on two years Muharrem Bairaktar defied the Partisans from the fastnesses of Liuma before escaping to Greece. Since then, small bands of outlaws have appeared on the borders of Mati; and Halit Kola is said to be among their leaders. The Partisans themselves are torn by feuds; and old Tsen Elezi has deserted Enver Hoja with all his clan and taken the familiar road to the mountains. Once more, as in 1941, the guerillas are little more than groups of hunted men, but they have sown the seeds of a new resistance movement. It will ripen with the perennial struggle of the Powers and sooner or later the harvest of hate must be reaped. Blood calls for blood in the mountains, and one day the tribes will take their revenge.

INDEX

Abdul Hamid, Sultan of Turkey (1876–1909), 16
Abyssinia, war with Italy, 27, 304; liberation of, 50, 139
Achmet (Turkoman), 273-4, 275, 283
Admiralty, 67 n.
Adriatic, strategic importance of, 2, 3, 5, 119, 164; mentioned, 1, 5, 6, 39, 41, 49, 61, 64, 79, 117, 175, 256, 318, 319, 339
Aditheu, 293
Aegean, 5
Afghanistan, 140, 276
Agrarians, 334
Airborne supply, vii, 79-80, 92, 93, 126, 178, 199, 232, 241, 272
Air Ministry, 23
Albania: collaborationist government of, 45-6, 47, 61, 77, 83, 99, 116, 131, 132, 135, 136, 184, 188, 218, 220, 221, 249, 253, 256, 257, 260, 262, 322, *see also* Collaboration *and* Collaborationists; effects of geography of, 6, 13-14, 52; frontiers of, 261; German occupation of, 115, 248, 304, *see also* Germany, German Army, German Administration; Germanic names in, 118; Greek occupation of, 40, *see also* Italian attack on Greece; history of, 12-22; Italian influence in, 19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 52; Italian occupation of, 21, 34, 35, 36, 40, 41, 42, 45, 46, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 61, 64, 77, 112, 113, 114, 115, 127, 134, 146, 163, 215, 261, 286, 297, 304, 310; language and literature of, xii, 38, 82, 108, 117, 231, 250, 263, 274; monarchy, 15, 20, 61, 66, 105, 112, 136, 185, 189, 191, 297, *see also* King Zog; Partition of, 3; politics in, 11, 101, 137, *see also* Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare, Zogist Movement and Balli Kombetar; population of, 13, *see also* Ghegs, Tosks; religions in, 11, 13-14, 52, 75, *see also* Catholic, Moslem and Orthodox districts; republic of, 19, 61, 136, 187, *see also* King Zog; strategic importance of, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 14; Turkish occupation of, 3, 6, 13, 15, 136; Viceroy of, 45; Central, 14, 47, 60, 85, 98, 140, 162, 173, 219, 265; Northern, 13, 29, 43, 73, 143, 161, 163, 170, 175, 197, 258, 263, 264, 317; Southern, 13, 40, 60, 64, 66, 87, 189, 204, 265, 314, 322, *see also* Northern Epirus; *Albania, The Rise of a Kingdom* (J. C. Swire), quoted, x, *see also* British Mission, Civil War, Collaboration, Collaborationists, Guerillas, Nationalists, Northern Epirus, Partisans, Resistance, Tribal System, Zogists
Albanian Alps, 148
Albanian Army, 262, 296, 303, 304, 305
Albanian Exiles in Belgrade, 37, 42, 133, 143
Albanian Gendarmerie, 38, 217, 225, 231, 250-51, 255, 270, 278, 318
Albanian Government: proposal for, in London, 101; representative, 71. *See also* Collaborationists
Albanian independence, 177, 238
Albanian names, note on spelling of, xii
Albanian oil, 20
Albanian Question, 3
Albanians: attitude to life of, 10-11, 52; character and temperament of, 12, 52; descent of, 5, *see also* Ghegs, Tosks; economy of, 9-11, 46, 52, 53, 104, 105, 107-11; hospitality of, 107, 122, 130, 252; loyal to allies, 30, 31; physical appearance of, 12; rising of, against Italians, 106, 114, 115, 123, 131, 136, 297, 304; rising of, against Turks, 312; social distinctions among, 111
Albergo Imperiale (Bari), 76
Alexander the Great, 12
Ali the Lion, Pasha of Yannina, 3, 12, 13
Allemani clan, 114, 115, 129
Allemani, Dule Bey (Mati chief), 114, 200, 206, 208, 217, 218, 293, 340
Allemani, Mt., 129, 206
Allied operations, 49, 60, 61, 67, 141, 175, 180
Allied radio stations, 35, *see also* Bari
Allied victory, confidence in, 45, 115

000

000

Allies, Albanians and, 30, 43, 51, 53, 58, 87, 88, 100, 101, 106, 126, 132, 135, 136, 156, 162, 163, 164, 184, 185, 188, 249, 253, 311; Greeks and, 51; Italians and, 63, 77, 123; Yugoslavia and, 26, 28; mentioned, 128, 142, 155, 170, 172, 189, 190, 194, 206, 208, 237, 243, 258, 331
Alpini, 39
Ambassadors' Conference (1913), 13
American college, 83
Amhara, 50
Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 21
Anglophiles, 164, 165
Anglo-Russian relations, 102, 119, 226
Anti-Communist front, 188-90, 191, 218, 241, 254
Anti-Fascists, 44-5, 209
Appeasement, 119, 235, 266, 315, 336
Apulia, 2, 76, 79, 330
Arabic language, 130
Arabic script, 113
Arabists, 73
Arabs, 27, 50, 336
Arapi, Pater Anton (Member of Council of Regency), 64
Ardennes, 30
Arslan (Smiley's bodyguard), 95
Aryans, 5, 276
Asia, 101, 151, 276, 277
Ataturk, Kemal, Turkish President (1923–38), 12
Athens, 25, 27, 29, 30, 286; British Military Mission in, 40
Austria-Hungary, 3, 4, 17, 33, 41, 122, 187, 259, 319
Austrians, 263, 291
Axis Powers, 32, 37, 38, 39, 46, 53, 65, 127, 135, 197; forces of, 49, 189. *See also* Germany, Germany Army, Italy

Badoglio, Marshal (Italian Prime Minister, 1943–4), 63
Bairaktar, Muharrem, Lord of Liuma (Gheg Chief), 20, 37, 92, 136, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 153, 156, 157, 162, 169, 202, 204, 205, 235, 268, 292, 302, 304, 311, 318, 324; and Abas Kupi, 202-3; and Mustafa Jinishi, 263; and Partisans, 307-8, 310, 340; and King Zog, 20, 143, 191, 304; an exile, 143-4; goes to Greece, 340; his forces, 265; his plans for revolt, 146-7, 170, 171; his son, 146; occupies Kukes, 64; Ramadan Kalloshi and, 136-7
Balkans, 2, 5, 10, 17, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 44, 144, 251, 330, 334, 339; British Missions in, viii, 334; clash of Powers in, 1, 2, 4, 9, 11, 131; Communism in, 55, 119; during war, 31, 38, 39, 40, 48, 50, 59, 61, 64, 71, 73, 82, 93, 94, 133, 146, 160, 184, 248, 254, 259; exiles from, in Paris, 152; politics in, 29, 118, 254, 259; Resistance Movements in, vii, 78
Balkan wars, 3, 17, 150
Balli Kombetar (National Union) (a conservative Tosk Resistance movement), 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 66, 172, 189, 236, 249, 267, 296, 303, 321, 324, 326; and Abas Kupi, 66, 99, 244, 262, 265; and collaboration, 66, 188, 189, 310; and Partisans, 61, 65, 66, 172, 185, 188, 189, 190, 222, 245; its forces, 60, 66, 104, 188, 222, 253, 254, 270, 288, 289, 294, 299, 300, 307; its leaders, 66, 185, 187, 189, 190, 249, 252, 257, 260, 286, 287, 296, 297, 320, 339
Baltic Sea, 160
Baltic states, 140
Baptista (Italian orderly), 126
Bari: operational Headquarters at, 78, 174, 183, 204, 208, 224, 233, 258, 266, 272, 277, 297, 309, 310, 312, 314, 315, 336, 337; British Mission at, 76, 78, 331-3, 334, 335; radio station, 263, 300, 311, 312. *See also* Operational Headquarters
Basha, Colonel Murad (Zogist Chief of Staff), 97, 102, 196, 217, 218, 219, 228, 340
Bastar, Mt. (operational base of Mission), 93, 122, 125, 184, 192, 206, 230
Bastar (village), 93, 95, 221, 222, 224
"Bazi Sani", *see* Kupi, Abas Agha
B.B.C., 217, 300
Baudelaire, quoted, 75
Bechit, Qaf, 185, 230, 242, 244
Bekir, Haji, 238
Bektashi Sect, 11, 32, 56, 75, 120
Belgium, 55
Belgrade, 19, 26, 29, 38, 42, 43, 63, 90, 184, 245; Albanians in, 18, 28, 32, 36, 38, 40, 44, 55, 87, 97, 143, 144, 150, 267, 268, 324; Author at, 23, 26, 27, 30, 37, 87, 101, 150, 154; American Legation at, 44; British Legation at,

23, 25, 26, 36, 37; British Military Mission at, 43, 150; Italian Embassy at, 37. *See also* Yugoslavia
Bennett, John, 26, 37, 90
Berane, 76, 178
Berar, Mt., 185
Berat, 63, 70, 214, 309, 310
Berchtold, 23
Bersaglieri, 39
Bias (Greek poet), 120
Bichaku, Ibrahim Bey (Collaborationist Prime Minister), 263, 270
Bismarck, 339
Bitutch, 153, 201
Biza, 317
Black Sea, 1, 160
Black Watch, 51
Bokhara, 276
" Bomba ", King, 335
Bosnia, 30 n., 3[illegible], 44, 149, 192, 270
Bosquet, Marshal, 68
Boyana, River, 325, 337
Brandt, Lt.-Col. Freidrich (" Corporal "), 140-42
Brindisi, 78, 79, 80, 187, 193, 196, 330, 331, 337
Britain, 39, 70, 78, 142, 146, 153, 188, 195, 198, 298; Battle of, 39; friendship for, 88, 99, 155, 183, 197, 264; hostility to, 59, 127; strategic interests of, 3, 4, 71, 119, 172, 238, 334. *See also* British Mission
British Army, 39, 41, 49, 78, 158, 159, 160, 175, 246, 255, 303, 312, 320, 336
British Mission to Albania: ambushes, 69, 289-92; appointment, 49-50; attack on German battery, 278-85; Author joins, 73; Bastar base, 93-5, 125-9, 192-9, 222; capture of base by Partisans, 208; despatch to Albania, 51, 58, 67, 81-2; doctrine of revolt, 128, 139, 165-73; early composition of, 67-71; instruction to, 78; and Italians, 64; in Italy, 76-80, 330-38; later composition of, 93-5; rear base at Murait, 193, 200, 206, 213, 215, 237; split up, 208 ff.; way of life, 90-91, 332; withdrawal of, 314 ff.
At Bastar, 93-5, 125-9, 192-9, 222; Bruz, 95, 217-18; Cape Rodonit, 273-278; Derye, 85-9; Dibra, 130-38; Konai, 158; Kruya, 117-21, 249; Kurat, 278-85; Kurbenesh, 292; Lester, 293-5; Liuma, 138-48; Malibhardhe, 295-302; Mamuras, 289-92; Mati, 111-17, 134, 159, 199, 208 ff.; Mazjhe, 285-7; Mener, 218-22; Mukai, 245-9, 259-60; Murait, 200-206; Preza, 287-9; Priske Vogel, 231-3; River Ishm, 269-73; Selit, 80; Shkrete, 117; Shupal, 121-5; Skurrai, 303-12; Sohodoll, 136-8; near Tirana, 233-45; Topise, 260-269; Velyes, 313-18; Zeye, 292-3; Ziber, 91-2
With Bairaktar, Muharrem, 145-156, 202-5; Chelai, 129, 207; Dine, 296 ff.; Ekrem Bey, 77; Elezis, 137-138; Ermenye, 286 ff.; Frasheri, 286 ff., 299; Fundo, 151-3; German staff officer, 271; Gheg chiefs, 114-159, 219; Gyok Bairaktar, 157-8; Herri, 192, 236, 244-5; Hoja, Aziz, 132-3; Kalloshi, 135-6, 202; Kiamil, 86, 237; Klissura, 296 ff.; Kryeziu, Gani, 153-6; Kryeziu Said, 150-84, 197 ff., 238 ff., 259 ff., 269; Kupi, Abas, 86-8, 96-103, 104-106, 111-25, 159, 173-8, 182-4, 194-205, 216-18, 222-4, 243-5, 249, 258, 261, 268, 269, 272, 288 ff., 296, 299-301, 315 ff.; Kupi, Petrit, 95-6; Kurti, 158-9, 293; Lita, 138; Luki, 173-8; Mehmet Ali, 150-53; Nosi, 83; Previsi, 296, 302-18; Sokol, 173-178; Toptani, 185-91, 249-58, 260, 306; Turkomans, 273 ff.; Vlora, 187-9; Zogists, 118-19, 121-5, 173-178, 183-4, 217, *et passim*
British Mission, Headquarters of, at Bari, communications with, 88, 103, 210, 215; and Mission in the field, 90, 149, 165, 173, 175, 203, 218, 222, 234, 235, 237, 258, 271, 308, 309, 312, 328, 331, 332, 334, 335; and civil war, 194-7, 223; and Fikri Dine, 260; and Kryezius, 263, 264, 310, 311; and Kupi, 100, 125, 126-9, 172, 177, 183, 184, 192, 199, 249, 260, 261, 265, 277, 298, and Maclean, 297, 314; and Partisans, 172, 204, 208, 214, 233, 266, 322, 335; and withdrawal of Mission, 315, 317, 325, 327
Bruz, 95, 217, 218
Bucharest, 248
Bukharin, 152
Bulgaria, 2, 40, 41, 48, 248, 251, 253, 260
Bullock, Lieutenant, 93, 201

Burma, 147; Chindits, 139
Burrel, 63, 106, 115, 116, 207, 218, 219, 222, 227, 241
Bushnesh, 289-92
Butka, Safet, 287
Button, Corporal, 317
Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, quoted, 1, 72
Byzantium, 118

"Caesar", *see* Hanau, Julius
Cairo, 27, 48, 67, 70, 71, 72, 73, 75, 76, 130, 187, 254, 255, 281, 336; Conference, 171
Calais, 94
Campbell, Sir Ronald, 23, 37
Carlist wars, 286
Caserta Palace, 335, 337
Catholic districts, 11, 13, 15, 30, 42, 92, 99, 111, 114, 151, 162, 163, 173, 180, 261, 262, 265, 269, 278, 292, 313, 321, 339
Caucasus, 16
Central Asians, 139, 140, 141, 280, *see also* Achmet, Kazaks, Tajiks, Turkomans
Chachi, Colonel Yahya, 122
Chamberlain, Neville, 87
Chelai, Kaplan Bey, 200
Chelai, Salami, 304-5
Chelai, Yussuf Bey, 114, 129, 200, 207, 208, 340
Chénier, André, 286
Cheshire, 94
Chetniks, 30 n., 44, 326, 334
Chiang Kai-shek, vii
China, 55, 339
Chinese Army, 147
Christianity, 314
Civil war, 65-6, 189, 190, 193-7, 201-3, 208, 214, 219-21, 230-32, 239, 249, 263, 265, 286, 306, 312; threat of, 128, 129, 134, 170, 171, 173, 175, 176, 200; in Yugoslavia, 149
Co-belligerency, 78
Collaboration, 218, 221, 223, 229, 234, 243, 248, 256, 257, 263, 305, 310, 326
Collaborationist Government at Tirana, under Italian rule, 77; under German rule, 171, 218, 220-21, 241, 256-258, 260, 296, 302
Collaborationists, 69, 163, 165, 197, 236, 240, 252, 263, 264, 270, 321
Collins, Sergeant, 93, 94, 201, 209
Comintern, 59, 151, 153, 323, 334
Commandos, 261, 312
Committee of Union and Progress, 189
Communism, 60, 62, 66, 96, 119, 152, 163, 172, 196, 221, 222, 248, 257, 262, 287, 314, 322
Communist Party, 35, 47, 51, 54, 55-7, 59-61, 66, 68, 151-3, 168, 195, 267, 309; influence of, 35, 53, 61
Communists, 11, 35, 53, 55, 58, 78, 87, 102, 120, 127, 131, 136, 152, 163, 164, 184, 189, 197, 210, 230, 243, 264, 266, 297, 310, 320, 327; *see also* Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare, Partisans
Condouriotis, 12
Constantinople, 16, 17, 27, 34, 37, 48, 135, 259; Albanians and, 48; Author in, 37
"Corsair", Captain, 232
Corsentino, Sergeant, U.S.A.A.F., 287, 325
Council of Regency, 64, 66, 188, 304; declares Albania's neutrality, 65
Count of Monte Cristo, The, 121
Crete, 48
Crimea, 16,
Cripps, Major, 27
Crispi, 12
Croatia, 43, 44, 78
Crusaders, 2, 113
Curzon, Marquess (British Foreign Secretary, 1919–24), 20
Cypriot Porter, 72
Cyrenaica, 50
Czechs, 27

"Daiti Hotel", 136, 252
Daiti, Mt., 122, 185
Dalmatia, 23; Karst of, 5
Dalmazzo, General (Italian C.-in-C.), 63
Damascus, 251
Danube, 1, 5
Dardanelles, 1
Davies, Brigadier, 67, 68, 69, 70, 73, 83, 87; captured, 69
Davis, Corporal, 209, 210, 218, 224, 231, 259, 327, 330
de Gaulle, General Charles, vii
Democrats, 11
Derna, 50, 51
Derye, 84, 85, 86, 88, 95, 193, 195, 237
Dibra, 15, 45, 76, 129, 143, 161, 162, 195, 200, 203, 212, 220, 225, 262, 266, 268, 321; chiefs of, 92, 99, 104 n., 142, 170, 201, 214, 263, 268; L.N.C.

000

troops at, 214, 263, 307; Mission at, 130-38; seized by Fikri Dine, 64
Dimitroff, George, 152
Dinaric Alps, 2, 5
Dine, Fikri (Gheg chief), 20, 64, 133, 136, 143, 162, 169, 191, 218, 241, 251, 253, 256-62, 296, 304, 311, 321, 339; becomes Prime Minister, 219
Displaced Persons Camp, 331
Divan, the, 16
Dobreit, 308, 309
Doda, Prenk Bib . . . Pasha (Captain of the Catholic Mirdita), 14
Doda Bairaktar (Zogist chief), 114, 220
Dodecanese, 73
Dodona, Oracle of, 11
"D" Organisation, 25-30, 48, 49, 72, 78
Drin (river), 45, 99, 133, 134, 136, 139, 145, 147, 153, 155, 156, 159, 162, 173, 178, 265, 308, 314, 318, 319; Black Drin (river), 92, 125, 129, 130, 142, 143, 144, 146, 148, 318; White Drin (river), 144, 148, 149, 318
Drini, Hamsa (follower of Kupi), 225-227, 289
Dual Monarchy, *see* Austria-Hungary
Duce, *see* Mussolini
Duffy, Lieut. Garry, 50
Dunsinane, 104
Durazzo, 2, 5, 14, 64, 117, 125, 179, 180, 182, 287, 316, 317, 322; Kupi and, 21, 32, 34, 46, 261, 268, 272, 273, 278, 289, 301, 312, 317; Smiley and, 2[illegible], 271, 272
Durham, Edith, 27
Dushanovitch, Ali (Tito's emissary to L.N.C.), 54, 59
Dyshnitsa, Ymer (member of L.N.C. Committee), 55, 56, 59, 62, 310, 324

E.A.M., vii, 194, 204
Eastern Question, 1, 9, 10, 119, 160
Ecole des Sciences Politiques, 29
Eden, Anthony (British Foreign Secretary, 1935–8, 1940–45), 326, 335
Effendi, Hafuz (Mati notable), 113
Egypt, 12, 16, 65, 75, 84, 130, 339; Khedive of, 254
Elbasan, 27, 63
Elezi Clan (Dibra chiefs), 136-7
Elezi, Dali, 136; Ersat, 136, 138; Gani, 136, 137, 138; Islam, 136, 137, 138, 201, 205; Jelal, 136; Sufi, 15; Tsen, 104, 136, 137, 214, 263, 268, 340
Elliott, Air Marshal, 78, 204
England, 28, 34, 122, 137, 165, 205, 331, 338
English (language), 95, 137, 187, 254, 270
Eno's, 137
Epirus, ii, 2, 12, 13, 51
Epirus, Northern (Southern Albania), 40, 58, 64, 66, 67, 70, 87, 100, 101, 124
Ermenye, Abas (Ballist commander), 262, 286, 287, 289, 299, 300, 339
Esdraelon, 74
Esthonia, 140
Europe, 53, 101, 144, 151, 153, 159, 175, 188, 189, 238, 276, 327
Europeans, 273

Fani, Lesser (river), 157, 312, 313, 315
Fascists, 11, 35, 53, 54, 61, 65, 77, 87, 197, 221, 238, 243, 334
Faya, Baba (member of L.N.C. Central Council), 56, 57, 59
Ferid Pasha (Ottoman Grand Vizier), 14, 187
Fieri revolution, 187
Fistun, S.S. General, 253, 288, 305
Foreign Office, British, 3, 24, 25, 36, 67, 79, 100, 128, 174
"Fortress Europe", 160
France, 3, 4, 21, 26, 31, 34, 37, 38, 55, 274, 286, 297, 315; Allied operations in, 141, 158, 159, 160, 175
Franciscan order, 173, 292
Franco, Captain (Italian prisoner with Mission), 94, 306
Frasheri, Mehdi Bey (Moslem Tosk chief and senior Regent of Albania, 1943–1944), 15, 64, 305
Frasheri, Midhat Bey (Moslem Tosk chief and Balli Kombetar leader), 15, 57, 62, 262, 296, 339; and British Mission, 189, 286-7, 299, 300, 320-21
Frasso, Count Carlo, 78, 187
French (language), 95, 96, 123, 146, 187, 237, 252
Fshat, 227, 229, 230
Fuad I, King of Egypt, 130
Fundo, Lazar (Gani Kryeziu's political adviser), 151-3, 309, 310, 311

Galata Saray, 16
Gammel, Lieut.-Gen. Sir James, 336
Geraldine, Queen, 21
German administration in Albania, 65-

67, 69-71, 78-9, 87-8, 93, 96, 99-102, 112, 114-16, 119-20, 123-4, 127, 132, 134, 136-7, 144, 146, 151, 153, 155-156, 161, 163-5, 168-73, 175-6, 183-190, 192-4, 196, 201-2, 205, 212-13, 218-20, 223, 230-31, 234, 236-8, 241, 243-4, 250, 252-3, 255-64, 270, 272, 275, 277, 285-6, 288-9, 292, 295-301, 304-6, 310, 320-21, 327, 339

German Armed Forces, 39, 40, 41, 48, 122, 140, 245, 326; in Albania, 64-7, 69, 71, 76, 103-4, 106, 125, 135-6, 139-42, 149-51, 154, 157, 159, 161, 164, 169, 180-82, 190, 201, 218, 220, 229-31, 233, 239-40, 247-8, 251-2, 254-5, 259, 263-5, 270-5, 278-85, 287-292, 294-5, 307-8, 312, 315-20, 329, 336; British propaganda to, 125, 270 XXI Mountain Corps, 103, 271, 280, 292, 305, 322; XXII Mountain Corps, 104; 181 Mountain Division, 103, 292; 297 Infantry Division, 103; Albanian S.S. Division (Skanderbeg), 104, 304; 3/297 Artillery Regiment, 278 ff.

German (language), 146, 187, 274, 294

German Legation in Tirana, 252, 263, 270

German occupation of Albania, 64

German reign of terror in Albania, 249, 252, 270

Germans, withdrawal of, from Albania, 71, 163, 236, 248, 249, 253, 257, 269, 293, 299, 306, 322

Germany, 4, 26, 35, 39, 43, 63, 99, 135, 137, 140, 162, 163, 165, 172, 190, 223, 228, 238, 251, 258, 260, 276, 289; and Balkans, 40-41, 48, 64, 71, 76, 133, 160, 248; and Yugoslavia, 30 n., 38, 41-4

Gestapo, 27, 43, 44, 251, 253, 255, 270

Ghegs, 5, 7, 30, 38, 52, 53, 55, 56, 61, 63, 78, 83-5, 87, 96, 104, 111, 120, 134, 137, 146, 160-5, 167-73, 175, 183, 312, 324; their chieftains, 55, 56, 66, 98, 133, 136, 138, 140, 143, 147, 151, 162-5, 168-70, 172, 177, 184, 193, 196, 198, 202, 219, 262, 268, 304, 311; Partisans, 138; their tribal system, 13, 53, 163, 266; and Kryezius, 29; and Zog, 17, 20, 22. *See also* Abas Kupi, Zogist Movement

Gibbon, quoted, 256

Gjinocastro, 39, 63

Glen, Lt.-Cmdr. Sandy, 24, 37, 67

Goebbels, Josef, 334

Goga, Gaitcho (member of Zogist Central Committee), 293, 295, 300, 316, 327, 328, 339

Gondar, 50

Gooch, 23

Great Powers, 1, 87, 257, 340

Great Russians, 245

Greece, 14, 21, 26, 31, 39-41, 76, 77, 87, 96, 161, 194, 210, 248, 256, 264, 286, 312, 339, 340; invaded by Italy, 39 ff.; King of, 40; resistance in, 51, 73

Greek Army, 39-41

Greek-Italian War, 39 ff.

Greek theology, 11

Guards, Brigade of, 281

Guerillas, vii, 51, 54 ff., 63 ff., 71, 81-2, 89, 96-7, 103 ff., 111, 113, 117, 122-123, 126, 139-42, 166-7, 174, 185, 199-200, 203, 212, 216-17, 225, 230, 245, 251, 265, 269-70, 276, 287, 290-291, 295, 300, 303, 312, 316-17, 340, *see also* Partisans, Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare, Zogist Movement, Balli Kombetar

Guribardhe, 225, 226, 227, 229

Gurre Madhe, 199, 207, 209

Gyok Bairaktar (Mirdita chief), 157

Gyoles, encounter at bridge, 179-82, 183, 186, 193

Hakmeria (blood feud), 112

Hampshire, 210

Hanau, Colonel Julius, 26

Hanover, 247

Hare, Major Alan, x, 81, 89, 91, 93, 104, 125, 129, 159, 185, 196, 208, 237; and Brigadier Davies, 69-70; and Kupi, 192-3; and Partisans, 197-8, 210; at Derye, 84-6, 88

Hasluck, Mrs., 27, 48, 50

Hass, 150, 264

Hermon, Mt., 75

Herri, 66

Herri, Jemal (Gheg chief), 222, 232, 243-5; and Zog, 20, 143, 191, 304; and Mission, 191-2, 236; his ambitions, 236; his forces, 239, 242, 247-8

Hibberdine, Capt. John, x, 92, 129, 317, 326, 329

Hibbert, Lieutenant, 92, 200

Himara, 39

Hitler, Adolf, 30, 102, 160, 224, 228, 253, 260

Hoja, Aziz Dino (Dibra chief), 130, 132, 133, 134
Hoja, Enver (Communist leader), vii, xii, 55, 56, 62, 68, 83, 96, 133, 172, 184, 193, 196, 198, 214, 266, 286, 297, 320, 340; military activities of, 83, 138, 164, 189; political activities of, 65, 66, 188, 189, 190, 267-8; and Ballists, 188-90; and British Mission, 208, 213, 233, 234-5, 265-6, 309, 314-15, 322, 326, 335-6; and civil war, 66, 149, 193, 224, 233, 234-5, 238, 241; and Gani Kryeziu, 339; and Said Kryeziu, 309-10, 337, 339; and Kupi, 66-7, 121, 171-2, 174, 197, 257, 265, 319, 324, 337; and Maclean, 59; and Smiley, 60
Hoja, Mehmet (Kosmet Partisan Commissar), 178-9
Hoja, Reshad (Brother of Aziz Dino), 132
Hotel Impériale, 76, 331, 332
Household Cavalry, 50
Hungary, 186
Hussein the Martyr, 76

Il Fuoco, d'Annunziò's, 269
Illyria, ii, 2, 6
Illyrians, 5, 6, 11
Imperial Guard, 16
Indian Brigade, 281
Intelligence Service, 25, 232
Ipi, Fakir of, 140-41
Iranians, 140
Ishm, 273
Ishm (river), 269
Iskander, 1
Islam, *see* Moslem Districts
Istanbul, *see* Constantinople
Iswolski, 23
Italian Army, 115, 123, 237, 304, 317, 328; prisoners, 94, 125, 279, 283, 284, 306, 319
Italian (language), 96, 140, 231, 237, 274, 306
Italy, 3, 4, 14, 19, 26, 37, 43, 60, 76, 79, 80, 122, 132, 138, 151, 235, 256, 315, 318, 320-21, 326, 327, 335, 336, 337; and Abyssinia, 50; and Germany, 39; and Greece, 39-41, 304; and Yugoslavia, 28, 39; and Zog, 19; Allied operations in, 49, 60, 61; as Headquarters of Mission, 69, 88, 89, 92, 170, 177, 178, 224, 236; capitulation of, 61, 63, 133, 144, 152, 163, 189, 247, 257, 267
Italy and Albania: influence, 20, 21; attack on, 21, 34, 261; in occupation of, 29-32, 35, 36, 41-5, 53, 56-9, 61, 62, 64, 65, 77, 97-9, 106, 113, 117, 121, 127, 131, 187, 189, 304
Ivan (Ukrainian prisoner of Germans), 245-7, 276, 281, 329

Jackson, Captain, 325
Jakova, 42, 76, 201, 318; Kosmet Partisans and, 151; Kryezius and, 29, 43, 44, 67, 151, 153, 238, 264, 308, 310, 339; Mission near, 150-59
Jan. 149
Janissaries, 275
Jenkins, Sergeant, 93, 94, 179, 180, 181, 184, 237, 272, 275, 288, 292, 297, 325
Jerusalem, 15, 255
Jinishi, Mustafa (Communist leader), 55-7, 59, 62, 214, 263, 267, 324; returns to Albania, 42, 45, 47; and Zog, 36; and Mission, 35; his death, 266, 268, 307
Jones, Sergeant, 93, 94, 184, 237, 272, 275, 297, 306, 325
Joni, Jon Marko (Catholic leader, Captain of the Mirdita), 15, 157, 158, 162, 169, 302, 326, 339, 340; an exile, 143; and collaboration, 120, 156, 164; his vacillation, 165, 170, 249, 299-301; and Kupi, 170, 249, 299-301; last pillar of Nationalists, 308; and Mission, 313. *See also* Mark Joni Markai (his son)
Joni, Skender, 340
Jonovitch, Yovan (Yugoslav political leader), 28, 30

Kalloshi family, 135, 136; Murad, 135; Myftar, 135; Ramadan (Dibra chief), 133, 135, 136, 137, 195, 196, 202, 263, 268; Selim, 135
Kam, 264
Kazaks, 274-7
Kemp, Major Peter, x, 76, 77, 79, 136, 331
Kepenek, 264
Khan, Ghenghis, 276
Kiamil, 86, 89, 237
Klissura, Ali Bey (Moslem Tosk and Balli Kombetar leader), 15, 18, 57, 297, 339; in exile, 19; returns to Albania, 21, 297; and Mission, 296-297, 300-1, 320-21
Klos, 159, 214, 227, 228, 241

000

Kola, Billal (Mati chief), 222, 241, 277, 285
Kola, Halit (Mission interpreter), 94-5, 222, 271, 328, 329, 340
Kolaver (Author's bodyguard), 134-5, 225, 227, 230, 284, 328, 329
Konai, 158
Konitza, Faik Bey, 20
Konitza, Mehmet Bey, 67
Köprülus, the, 12
Korab, Mt., 139, 148
Koran, the, 113
Korcha, 39, 45, 47, 54, 55, 63, 96, 151, 286, 293
"Kosmet" (Partisans of Marshal Tito operating in Kossovo-Metohija)
Kossovars, 18, 19, 31, 32, 44, 151
Kossovo, 6, 39, 42, 59, 76, 104, 153, 305, 308; Italian armies in, 44; and Kryezius, 29, 269; and Albania, 13, 31, 44, 52, 58, 65, 87, 100, 101, 118, 124, 163, 264
Kostengje, 69
Kotsuli, 114-15
Kralya Milana, 36
Krasniqi, 140, 154, 178, 264
Kremlin, 276, *see also* Moscow, Russia
Kruya, 15, 18, 32, 33, 179, 247, 292, 330; taken by Germans, 64; Kupi and, 33, 45, 46, 54, 63, 66, 98, 102, 162, 196, 210, 219-21, 241, 242, 265, 288, 289; Mission at, 104, 117 ff., 126, 200, 215, 216, 239, 249, 260, 273, 285; Partisans at, 259, 286, 289; Zogists and, 98, 286, 289, 317
Kruya Mountains, 117-18, 120, 180, 243, 272, 277, 285
Kruya, Mustafa (Gheg chief and collaborationist Premier), 15, 18, 323, 339; and Zog, 19, 33, 45, 46; and Kupi, 45-7, 120, 219-20, 223, 324; in Italy, 19; returns to Albania, 21, 45; goes to Vienna, 263
Kryeziu family, 32, 35, 39, 44, 45, 47, 67, 151, 152, 154, 317
Kryeziu, Gani Bey (Gheg chief and Kossovar leader), 29, 183, 292, 311, 339; imprisoned by Italians, 44-5; in Yugoslavia, 25, 28, 34, 44, 268, 324; returns to Albania, 42, 67; and Author, 25, 28, 34; and Collaborationists, 164; and Fundo, 152; and Hill, 43; and Kemp, 77; and Kupi, 34, 35, 324; Mission and, 147, 153-156, 183, 235; and Muharrem, 144; and Neel, 92; and Partisans, 151, 197, 204, 235, 267, 310, 339; his forces, 71, 150, 162, 169, 170, 174, 175, 182, 193, 201, 263-4, 265, 269, 308, 309
Kryeziu, Hassan Bey, 29, 42, 44, 67, 263, 308, 310, 339
Kryeziu, Said Bey (Gani's brother), imprisoned by Italians, 44-5; in Yugoslavia, 25, 29, 35, 44; and Author, 25, 29; and Kupi, 136, 155; returns to Albania, 42, 67; and Hill, 43; and Kemp, 77; and Mission, 150-84, 197 ff., 238 ff., 259 ff., 268, 269; rejoins Gani, 269, 308; and Partisans, 309-10, 339; in Italy, 337
Kryeziu, Tsena Bey, 15, 18, 19, 20, 28, 31, 33, 154
Kthelle, 114
Kukes, 64, 143, 144, 148, 156, 157, 161, 263, 307, 318
Kupi, Abas Agha (Gheg chief and Zogist leader), vii, 32, 110; early life, 32-4; as administrator, 33, 98; defender of Durazzo, 21, 32, 34, 278; in Constantinople, 34; in Yugoslavia, 34-6, 39; returns to Albania, 42, 47-8; and Author, 34, 96 ff., 226-30, 249; and Ballists, 62, 66; and Collaborationists, 164, 221, 234, 241 ff., 256 ff.; and Jemal Herri, 192; and Enver Hoja, 62, 66; and Mustafa Jinishi, 56-7, 267-8; and Kolaver, 134; and Mustafa Kruya, 45-7; and Kryezius, 136, 155; and British Mission, 71, 74, 78, 83, 86-8, 92, 96-103, 104-6, 107, 111-25, 126-9, 155, 156, 159, 173-8, 182-4, 193-205, 214, 215, 216-18, 222-4, 235, 243-5, 258, 260, 261, 268-9, 272, 275, 280, 288 ff., 296-9, 299-301; and Partisans, 99, 100, 127, 134, 160, 171-2, 179, 219, 230, 240, 242, 277, 310; and Smiley, 179, 181; at Kruya, 45, 54-8, 63, 64, 210, 220, 265, 285, 286; conference in Italy, 206, 208, 224, 231; his bodyguard, 46-7, 70, 302; leader of Gheg guerillas, 54-8, 66, 70, 132, 136, 147, 162, 169, 172, 191, 212, 213, 249, 265, 311; and Italian collapse, 61-64; his vacillation, 86, 91, 170, 238; his escape, 315 ff., 335 ff.; and instructions from Zog, 170, 174, 183, 199; and attack on Durazzo, 261, 268, 272, 273, 312

Kupi, Petrit, 95-6, 121, 174, 180, 217, 269, 273, 278-9, 283-5, 294, 315-16, 319-20, 327-8, 337, 339
Kupi, Rustum, 121, 316, 337, 339
Kurat, 278, 280, 284
Kurbenesh, 258, 262, 289, 296, 300, 301, 304, 312, 318
Kurdari, 208
Kurti, Captain, 90
Kurti, Sul ("Lion of Mati"), 114, 158, 200-1, 210, 218-20, 222, 227-9, 293, 340
Kutchi, 30

Lawrence, Fred, 27
Lawrence, T. E., 27, 165, 251
League of Nations, 15
Leake, Lt.-Col. Philip, 72-3, 149, 159
Lecce, 77, 80, 82
Legality Movement, *see* Zogist Movement
Lek, Law of, 8-9, 112
Lenin, 144
Leninism, 23
Lester, 293-5
Levant, 1, 4; international rivalry in, 1, 4, 5
Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare, 56-60, 62-63, 65-6, 78, 116, 119, 123, 127, 133, 135, 149, 163-4, 172, 183, 188-9, 193, 194, 197, 202-4, 206, 208, 213, 235, 245, 263-4, 266, 307, 309-10, 314, 322, 328; Central Council, 56-57, 59, 61, 68, 69, 83, 102, 267, 268; its forces, 70-71, 136, 146, 170-71, 176, 200-1, 209, 219, 225, 269, 322; 1st L.N.C. Division, 136, 214, 215, 216, 309, 314; 5th Brigade, 308-9
Lezi, Tsen, 104, 105
Liberalism, 221, 297
Libohovo, Ekrem Bey, 77
Liqa, 191
Lis, Captain Michael, 92
Lita, Osman (Liuman chief), 138 ff.
Lita, Sherif, 138, 201
Little Entente, 31
Liuma, 37, 142, 143, 144, 156, 162, 202, 263, 265, 307, 318, 340; Mission at, 138, 145-7
Llesh, 313, 317, 318
Llesh, Aqif, 133-4
Llesh, Haji, 133
Lloyd, Lord, 254
London, 21, 25, 40, 67, 71, 73, 75, 85, 124, 128, 235, 298, 339, *see also* Foreign Office, Britain
Long Range Desert Group, 325
Louis Napoleon, 144
Lufi, Res, 158
Luftwaffe, 39
Luli, Father Lek, 173, 176, 178-9
Lura, 158, 162, 184, 193, 195, 198, 200, 219, 237
Luz, 180, 268, 277
Lysa, 216

Macedon, 12
Macedonia, ii, 13, 16, 27, 41, 47, 64, 131, 133, 135, 161, 201
Maclean, Colonel Bill, D.S.O. (Commander of British Mission), x, 49-51, 73, 75-6, 79, 91, 110, 139, 276; first mission to Albania, 58-60, 68, 286; leaves Albania, 67; his return to Albania, 71, 81; and Nosi, 83; and Kupi, 87-8, 102-4, 108, 123-4, 175-8, 196, 202-5, 249-50, 260-2, 272-3, 289-290, 297, 301; and Mission, 88-9, 92, 98, 129, 133, 135, 137, 155, 185, 192, 195, 199-201, 207, 209, 215, 218, 222, 224, 230-31, 238-40, 259, 268, 278-284, 294, 309, 312; at Zogist Headquarters, 122; return to Italy, 297, 314-15, 325, 327, 329-30, 332 ff.
Macmillan, Harold (British Minister Resident, Mediterranean Theatre of Operations), 79, 335
Maleshova, Seifullah (Communist leader), 55, 56, 59, 152, 324
Malibardhe, 295, 296, 299, 302
Mali Shengjit (Mt. St. John), 158
Mallet, Donald, 75
Maltsia i Madhe, 321
Maltsia Tirana, 221
Mamuras, 292-3
Manon Lescaut, 212
Mao Tse-tung, vii
"Marechal", 273, 275, 276
Mario, Lieutenant, 94, 306
Markai, Mark Joni (Collaborationist leader and son of captain of Mirdita), 120, 219, 220, 324, 340
Martanesh, 56, 225, 229
Marx and Marxism, 29, 121, 247, 267
Mati, and Zog, 15, 16, 17, 106, 115; and Zogists, 98, 317; Chiefs of, 95, 131, 158, 162, 200, 205, 207, 208, 238, 293; Kupi and, 45, 64, 66, 102, 162, 196, 217, 223-5, 230, 240-3, 289; Partisans and, 223-5, 228-9, 234, 241-3; Mission in, 104-17, 126, 134,

000

156, 159, 199, 206, 210, 213, 218-22, 225
Mati-Kruya road, 118
Mati, Lion of, *see* Sul Kurti
Mati (river), 45, 89, 93, 129, 184, 209, 216, 312-15, 319
Matsukull, 158, 184, 193, 200, 210, 220, 232
Mazjhe, 273, 277, 285, 286
Mediterranean, 1, 2, 71, 79
Mehdi Bey, *see* Frasheri (Senior Regent of Albania)
Mehmet Ali (Bairaktar of Hass), 150, 153
Mehmet Ali (of Egypt), 12
Mehmet Shehu, 214, 222, 225
Mener, 218, 221, 222
Menshevism, 62
Mentone, 187
Merret, Captain Ian, 93, 184, 193, 200, 203, 237, 270, 272, 287, 289, 305, 325
Mertur, 42, 92, 173
Middle East, 141, 254, 255, *see also* Levant
Middle East Command, 27, 38, 71; Albanian section, 72-3; Persian Bureau, 73
Mihailovitch, General Draja, vii, 30 n., 49, 128, 138, 144, 165, 171, 194, 221, 326, 336; quoted, 302
Miladin, 54
Milot, 293
Mirdita, 13, 14, 30, 90, 105, 114, 120, 143, 148, 156-8, 162, 220, 241, 262, 269, 289, 301, 312, 313, 314, 317, 318, 340; Abbot of, 158; Captain of, *see* Jon Marko Joni
Mishka I, 245, 276, 281, 283
Mishka II, 245
Mitrovitsa, Rejeb Bey (collaborationist Premier), 184
Mohammed Ali Club, 187
Monarchists, 35, 83, 106, 125, 126, 127, 147, 320, *see also* Zogist Movement
Mongolians, 273-4, 276-7
Montenegro, 3, 5, 13, 28, 30, 76, 103, 138, 178, 264, 270, 318, 319, 320, 326, 330, 337
Morava, 1
Moscow, 35, 47, 119, 151, 152, 153, 247; trials, 152, 247. *See also* Kremlin, Russia
Moslem districts, 6, 11, 13, 15, 43, 44, 52, 82, 86, 105, 154, 162, 263, 313, 314
"Mr. Can", *see* Islam Elezi
Mucho, Skender, 252, 287
Mukai, 62, 245, 249, 267; Agreement, 65, 66, 185, 189
Mukattam Cliffs, 75
Murait, 193, 200, 206, 213, 215, 237
Murresit, Qafa, 89, 217, 221, 225
Mussolini, 4, 26, 30, 34, 39, 44, 62, 63, 192

Naples, 335; King of, 256
Napoleon, 34, 87, 91, 269, 322
Napoleonic Wars, 3
National Liberation Movement, *see* Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare
National Union, *see* Balli Kombetar
Nationalist Movement, 146, 243, 248, 249, 253, 256, 258, 265, 267, 268, 286, 289, 297, 299-301, 307, 311, 320-21, *see also* Abas Kupi, Zogist Movement
Nazis, 35, 248, *see also* Germany, Gestapo
Ndreou, Dali (Commander of 1st L.N.C. Division), 136, 214, 309, 310
Neel, Squadron-Leader Tony, 92, 129, 139, 140, 141, 173, 317, 326, 331; and Brandt, 140-42; and Bairaktar of Krasniqi, 140
Neubacher, Dr., 184, 192, 218
Nicholls, Colonel G. C., 69, 70, 185
Nikai, 42, 92, 141, 173
Noli, Fan (Bishop and Premier of Albania), 15, 18, 19, 33, 52, 113, 297
Normans, 2
Nosi, Frederick, 83
Nosi, Lef (member of Council of Regency), 64, 83
Nuits St. Georges, 85

Oakley-Hill, Lt.-Col., 38, 39, 42, 43, 191
Olympic games, 293
Oroshi, 158
Orthodox districts, 11, 13, 15, 30, 52
Otranto, Straits of, 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 14, 194, 322, 337
Otter, Corporal, 93, 94, 209
Ottoman Empire, 1, 3, 4, 6, 12, 13, 15, 18, 32, 53, 105, 111, 113, 122, 130, 131, 187, 247, 254, 259, 305, 312
O.V.R.A., 37, 44
Oxford, 23

Palestine, 15, 50
Palli, Ndue (Catholic chief), 278, 279, 284, 285

Pamirs, 140, 276, 277
Panzers, 30
Parachuting, 50, 74-5, 79, 80-81, 90, 160, 203
Pariani, General, 304
Paris, 21, 35, 114, 143, 152, 203, 252, 310
Parker, Ralph, 24, 25, 27, 29, 39
Partisans, 54-6, 61, 83, 92, 116, 129, 133, 136, 138, 159, 167-8, 171, 176, 188, 210, 212, 213, 223, 238, 334; their forces, 59, 63, 65, 69, 104, 144, 163, 184, 193, 195, 206, 208, 209, 210, 214-17, 218, 224-30, 239, 240, 241-2, 248, 255, 259, 263, 265, 285, 295, 300, 306-7, 313, 317, 322; their leaders. 59, 62, 83, 124, 163, 172, 174-5, 197, 206, 261, 307; and Mission, 58, 83, 137, 174-5, 197-8, 207, 215, 314-15, 319; and Smith Mission, 203-5, 209, 214, 234-5; and Ballists, 65, 185, 188-90, 257, 297; and Germans, 64, 65, 101-2, 119, 154, 234; and Gani Kryeziu, 151, 309-11; and Kupi, 99, 100, 102, 106, 124, 127, 134, 160, 174-5, 202, 204-5, 206, 210, 217, 219, 221-2, 224, 240, 242, 244, 298, 302; and Zog, 101; and Zogists, 83, 86, 124, 127, 134, 149, 160, 170, 171, 177, 196, 199, 201, 218, 221, 233, 277, 285-286, 295, 326; Provisional Government, 214, 265, 268; and Italian capitulation, 63-4; and Russia, 102, 164, 171, 190, 298; Gheg Partisans, 138; Mati Partisans, 207; Macedonian Partisans, 201; Partisans in Dibra, 138. *See also* Communists, Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare
Partisans, Tito's, 30 n., 44, 47, 54, 77, 133, 135, 178, 201, 270
Patin, 208
Paul, Prince Regent of Yugoslavia, 28, 37, 39-40, 326
Pavle, 245
Pazaari-Urs, 117
Pelasgians, 5, 6
Percy, Maj.-Gen. Sir Jocelyn, 95, 217
Permeti, 116
Persia, 129, 140, 274, 276
Peshkopi, 129
Petch, 296
Peter II, King of Yugoslavia, 43
Peza, 56, 92
Peza, Muslim, 56, 57, 59
Pilgrimage, the, 273
Pindus, 5, 39, 41
Pitsari, Musa (supporter of Kupi), 222, 225, 289, 295
Pittard, Lieutenant, S.A.A.F., 325
Pogradets, 39, 63
Poland, 23, 175
Pompeii, 337
Pope, the, 256
Prague, 19, 27, 28
Previsi, General Prenk (Gheg chief, collaborationist C.-in-C.), 20, 143, 191, 339; and Kupi, 256-8, 262, 289; and Mission, 296, 302-6, 312-313, 318
Preza, 261, 272, 273, 283, 287, 288, 289, 302, 312, 315, 317
Pribram, 23
Prince Igor, 277
Priske, 186
Priske Vogel, 231, 232, 233
Prizren, 141, 144, 149, 161
Prokletia Alps, 93, 318
Provost Marshal, 332
Prusit, 208
Puka, 162, 264
Pyramids, 269
Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, ii, 12

Radicals, 15
Radical Socialist Party, 297
Radonitch, Colonel, 30
Ramadan (Aziz Dino Hoja's uncle), 132-3
Ramiz (supporter of Kupi), 180-82, 316, 325, 339
Rashk, 313
Red Army, 139-40, 160, 248, 274, 275, 277
Reflections on the Revolutions of our Time (Laski) 212
Rejeb Pasha, Marshal, 15-16
Republican Party, 187, 189, 297, 320
Reshad, Sultan, 254
Resistance in Albania, vii, 35, 39, 48, 49, 51, 53, 54, 58, 60, 104, 146, 197, 256, 317, 321, 340; problems of leadership, 36. *See also* Balli Kombetar, Communists, Kryezius, Kupi, Partisans, Zogist Movement, Levisiya Nacional Clirimtare
Resistance in Greece, 51
Resistance in Yugoslavia, 38, 41, 42, 327, *see also* Mihailovitch, Tito
Resistance Movements, vii, 265
Rhodesia, 325

000

Riddle, Major Richard, 92, 125, 129-130, 133, 135, 139, 141-2, 144-5, 147, 149, 155, 200-1, 209
Rifaat, 178-9
Robertson, Grant, 23
Rodonit, 117, 271, 273, 330
Roman Revolution, The (Ronald Syme), quoted, 160
Rome, 2, 12, 39, 60, 67, 77, 304, 339; March on, 44; capture of, 158, 160
Rones, Mount, 157
Roumania, 40, 175, 248, 253, 260
Royal Air Force, 39, 78, 118, 236, 241, 250, 271, 296
Royal Engineers, 25, 51
Royal Navy, 272, 314, 317, 325, 329, 330
Royal Scots Greys, 50
Ruhr, 245
Russia, 3, 4, 102, 119, 137-8, 140, 159, 160, 164, 171, 175, 246, 298, 322, 331; influence of, 51, 87, 102, 119, 120, 171, 172, 190, 235, 258; Tsars of, 276, 277
Russian (language), 274
Russians, 45, 102, 245-6, 276 ff., 328-329, 330, 331
Rutigliano, 337

Sabotage, 25, 31, 60, 94, 155, 180 ff., 264
Saint Matthew, quoted, ii
Salimani, 140, 154, 155
Salonika, 1, 2, 27, 30, 40, 41, 86; Salonika front, 31
Saltiq, Said, 117
Samarkand, 276
San Giovani di Medua, 316
Sarafis, General, 335
Saranda, 39, 312
Sarajevo, 39
Saudi Arabia, 72
Sava, 36
Schumacher, Staff-Sergeant, U.S.A.A.F., 287, 325
Scutari, 42, 43, 64, 98, 103, 111, 142, 154, 162, 173, 255, 263, 288, 292, 304, 313, 316 ff., 322, 325, 326, 327, 339; Scutari Lake, 236
Scutari-Kukes-Prizren Road, 144, 148, 149, 156, 157, 161
Scutari-Tirana Road, 161, 179, 180, 231, 270, 291
Secret Service, 27, 72; German, 141, 144-
Security, 329
Selit, 89
Selite, 295
Serbia, 2, 3, 4, 16, 41, 44, 59, 122, 210, 326, 327
Serb (language), 96, 133, 226, 274
Seymour, Lt.-Col. George, 70, 81, 82, 84-6, 88-93, 178, 237
Shaqir (interpreter), 82, 95, 97, 157, 210, 225, 230, 328, 329, 340
Shengjin, 316
Shengyerg, 82-3, 95, 193, 197, 198, 206, 221, 222, 224, 229, 230
Shiyak, 125, 162, 177, 220, 222, 225, 262, 289
Shkelzen, 148
Shkipetare, ii, 12
Shkrete, 117, 216
Shkumbi (river), 5, 55, 67, 104, 171, 175, 241
Shupal (valley), 89, 93, 95, 185, 209, 217, 220, 222, 230
Shupal (village), 121, 123, 174, 178, 183, 192-3, 201, 218-19, 221, 225, 227, 233, 242, 289
Simcox, Major Tony, x, 92, 147, 155, 193, 201, 209, 263, 308, 309, 310, 331
Skanderbeg, 3, 7, 12, 32, 256, 259, 313, 318
Skanderbeg Range, 115, 117, 216, 292
Skanderbeg S.S. Division (Quisling), 104
Skoplje, 27, 30, 39, 43
Skurrai, 303, 306, 310, 312
Slavs, 13, 96, 131, 151, 163, 225
Smiley, Major David, D.S.O., M.C., x, 50, 73, 75-6, 91, 109, 110, 339; first Mission, 50-51, 58-60, 67-8; returns to Albania, 79, 81, 83, 93, 95; at base, 104, 116, 125, 129, 159, 177, 192, 196; attacks bridge at Gyoles, 179-82, 186; at Lura conference, 199, 202, 209; at Murai base, 213, 215-216, 218, 230, 231, 243, 259; at coast, 224, 231, 316-17; ill with fever, 240; goes to Durazzo, 262, 269, 271-2; at Kurat, 278, 280, 283-284; at Preza, 288-9; at Lester, 295; at Malibardhe, 299-300; at Skurrai, 307, 312; returns to Italy, 297, 314-315, 320, 325, 331, 337
Smith, Major Victor, 203 ff., 214, 217, 219, 223, 233-4, 261, 310
Smythe, Captain, 92
Social Democracy, 152, 238

000

Socialist Party of Albania, 152
Sohodoll, 136-7
Sokol, Nik (Zogist chief), 173, 178
Sons of the Eagle (Shkipetare), ii, 12
South Slavs, vii, xii
Spain, 55, 76
Spoleto, Duke of, 78
Staff College, 165
Stalin, Joseph, 247, 344; quoted, 23
Stalinism, 55, 152
Stamboul, *see* Constantinople
Stamm, Qafa, 115, 209-10, 215-16, 219-20, 222, 242
Stepani, Ali, 83
Stepani, Rames, 83
Stirling, Colonel Frank, 27, 34, 48, 97
Sublime Porte, 189; *see also* Ottoman Empire
Sudan, 28, 139
Supreme Command, 335-6
Syria, 50

Tajikistan, 276
Tajiks, 140, 274-8, 280-84
Tamerlane, 140, 276
Taroku, Osman, 236
Teheran Conference, 87, 171
Teya, 148
Thessalonika, *see* Salonika
Third Republic, 297
Thorez, Maurice, vii
Times, The, 24, 27, 126
Tirana, 26, 62, 70, 90, 92, 93, 103, 117, 118, 123, 158, 187-8, 339, 340; and Zog, 19, 33, 113, 143; and Italians, 21, 45, 46, 64, 77, 247; Collaborationist Government at, 65, 66, 69, 99, 131, 136, 185, 187, 192, 219, 220, 224, 241, 256, 257, 263, *see also* Collaborationist Government; Mission and, 80, 85, 90, 95, 125, 149, 191, 218, 222, 232, 237, 248, 251; and Zogists, 98, 162, 196, 312, 317, 321; and Ballists, 104, 257; and Partisans, 253, 254, 267; Author in, 250-55; Chamber of Commerce, 241; Council Chamber, 251; Hotel Metropole, 251
Tirana, Pact of (1926), 4, 19
Tirana-Derye road, 88
Tirana-Scutari road, 161, 179, 231, 279, 272, 287, 289
Tirna-Shupal road, 230
Tito, Marshal, vii, 30 n., 54, 119, 133, 151, 153, 163, 178, 264, 326, 327, 334, 339
Tittoni, Count, 3
Todt organisation, 192, 245
Tomori, 148
Topise, 260, 262, 268
Topoyan, 148
Toptani, Abdi Bey, 185, 312
Toptani, Essad Pasha, 14, 32, 33, 113, 185
Toptani, Ishan Bey, 62, 70, 186-7, 339; and Mission, 185-91, 231, 249-55, 258, 260, 268-9, 306, 316, 319-20, 337
Tosks, 5, 13, 17, 22, 29, 53, 75, 81, 95, 104, 163, 172, 178, 287, 324; chiefs, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 98; Partisans, 54-57, 63, 210
Tribal system, 7-10, 13, 15, 105, 112, 116, 131, 161, 168, 266-7, 340
Triple Alliance, 23
Triple Entente, 23
Tripoli, 15
Tripolitanian War, 130
Trotskyism, 152
Tsuri, Bairam Bey, 15, 81, 84, 154
Tunisia, 49
Turkey (modern), 21, 32, 43, 49
Turkis, 140 n.
Turkish Empire, *see* Ottoman Empire
Turkomans, 139-42, 271-7, 282-3, 288-289, 294, 299, 303 ff., 313, 316-19, 321-2, 328
Tuyanit, Qaf, 174
Tyrol, 293

Ukrainians, 245
United Front, 35, 37-44, 48, 51, 55, 61, 67, 144, 191, 267
United Nations, 87, 100, 101, 118, 124
United States, 15, 61, 125, 160
Uzbegs, 277

Valona, 1, 5, 39, 63, 67, 98, 114, 187, 222
Vardar (river), 1, 148
Vatican, 339
Veli, 95, 179, 181
Velyes, Mt., 313, 315-18
Venice, 2, 3, 256, 316
Ventotteno, 44, 67, 152, 286
Vergniaud, Pierre, quoted, 206
Vesuvius, Mt., 82
Via Egnatia, 2
Vienna, 17, 143, 187, 263, 339
Vilze, 179
Viniall, 200
Vlach, 151, 293

Vlahn, 153
Vlora, Ismail Kemal (Tosk chief), 14, 78, 187
Vlora, Jemaleddin, Pasha, 254, 339
Vlora, Nureddin Bey (nephew of Ismail), 78, 187-9, 249-54, 260, 287, 339
Voivodina, 32
Vorre, 259, 272, 289
Vuchitern, Salih Hoja (Albanian politician and member of Zogist central committee), 118, 119, 123
Vukadinovitch, Major, 326

Wales, 121
Walter, Bekir, 113-14
Walter clan, 113-14
Warnecke, Lieutenant von, 247-8
Wavell, General Sir Archibald (now Field-Marshal Earl), 27, 28
Weapons, 91, 101-2, 107, 110, 122-3, 126-7, 131-2, 146, 154-5, 162, 170, 173, 175-6, 182-3, 190, 196, 201, 207, 233-5, 241, 261, 272, 300
Wellington, Duke of, 123
Werther (Goethe), 269
Western Democracies, 58, 221
Western Desert, 50
Western influence, 7, 9, 15, 55
White Russians, 141
Wied, Prince William of, 14
Wilhelm II, Kaiser, 145
Williamson, Corporal, 51
Wilson, General Sir Henry Maitland (now Field-Marshal Lord), 78, 335, 336
Wingate, Maj.-Gen. Orde, 50, 139, 165
Wireless Transmission, vii, 68, 69, 70, 88-9, 94, 198-9, 201, 215, 224, 309
Women, the place of, 111
Wordsworth, quoted, 7
World War I, 1, 4, 17, 23, 27, 38, 319
World War II, vii, 65
Wrangel, General, 18

Yannina, 3, 104
Yildiz, 16
Young Communist League, 247
Young Turks, 16
Yugoslavia, 4, 14, 21, 32, 34, 37-41, 133, 326; and Allies, 26, 28; and Albania, 18, 19, 31, 39, 40, 54, 101, 143; and Germany, 30 n., 41, 101; Army, 41-3; threat to, by Axis, 31, 41; capitulation, 43-4; Communists in, 47; Resistance, 30 n., 52, 171, 194; British Missions in, 153, 171, 194

Zali Herrit, 236, 242, 244
Zelenitsa, Teke (Zogist politician), 118
Zemun Concentration Camp, 44, 253
Zervas, General, vii, 165, 194, 204, 335
Zeye, 292, 293
Ziber, 89-93, 95, 116, 159
Zog, 12, 15-22, 27, 31, 33-6, 40, 56-7, 77, 87, 97-102, 105-6, 113-14, 124-5, 128, 131-6, 143, 159, 170, 173-4, 183, 199, 261, 302, 339; as youth, 15-16; in World War I, 17; after war, 17-19; and Republic, 19; as king, 20, 52-3, 77, 98, 118, 143, 187, 191, 252, 293, 297, 304; forced to flee, 21, 34, 114, 191, 297; effects of his rule, 21-2, 52-3; and Yugoslavs, 18-19, 143; and Mati, 106; and Abas Kupi, 33-4; and Mustafa Kruya, 45-6
Zog, Jemal Pasha, 15-16
Zogai, 308
Zogist Movement, 66-7, 81, 83, 89-90, 95-8, 100, 101-2, 104, 106, 112, 113, 118-29, 132, 135, 158, 175, 184, 199-204, 233-8, 240-44, 261-6, 272-3, 340; its forces, 71, 78, 96, 123, 126, 182, 183, 230, 273, 277-85, 297-301, 302; chiefs, 97, 116, 139, 159, 173 ff., 179, 181; and Partisans, 83, 86, 92, 124, 149, 170-73, 177, 193, 194, 199, 201, 209 ff., 214, 216 ff., 224 ff., 233, 277 ff., 285-9, 306; Central Committee, 118-19, 123-5, 127, 220, 293
Zogolli, 201-2

THE END

7: Amery
114

EG1 Albania EG1

[For the author's account of his entry into the British Intelligence group known as the "D" organization, its organizational set-up, and its World War II mission in the Balkans, see pp. 23-31, category 116.]

7: Amery   EG1 Albania EG1
669

[For an account of the Resistance movement in Albania by a British Intelligence agent assigned to the Zogist forces led by Abas Kupi, which were abandoned in 1944 in favor of the Communist-led Partisans, see category 116, entire source.]